



Ocean Educational Consulting

## **Killer Student Resumes**

# Brain Dump

To get started, you are going to do a “brain dump.” Reflect back on all activities that you have participated in since grade nine and list them. Pay no attention to length at this point. You just want to get them all down on paper. This exercise will be particularly useful as you begin to think about responses to the personal statement. Moreover, having all activities in one place will make it easier to get strong letters of recommendation.

There are a couple of different ways that you can approach the brain dump activity. First, you can list the activities that are of most interest to you, indicate which grade years you participated in them, include the time commitment, and note any leadership positions, honors, or awards. The other way to deal with the brain dump is to go through activities chronologically. If you fear that you may leave out some possibly important activities, this is the better strategy.

Worksheet: Brain Dump			
Activity	Grade (9, 10, 11, 12)	Hours per week/year	Positions, honors, awards

# Getting Organized

Now you need to organize these activities by theme and flesh them out a bit. This will serve three different purposes. First, these detailed activity sheets will help you to fill out the actual applications. Second, these detailed versions will inspire you as we move to the personal statement for the next step. And finally, these documents will prove to be tremendously helpful when you request letters of recommendation (if your college requires them).

You are first going to organize your brain dump. There are two things to keep in mind as you go through this process. First, make sure that you list your activities in the order of importance for you. This is required for many applications, so it is best to just organize your materials that way right now.

Second, you will reorganize your activities into six categories:

- 1) School-Sponsored Activities (clubs, political positions, newspaper, the arts)
- 2) Employment (paid jobs or internships)
- 3) Community Service (volunteer positions)
- 4) Sports (differentiate between community and school sports clubs)
- 5) Travel (any domestic or international travel experiences)
- 6) Special Interests/Talents (hobbies, pursuits, special circumstances).

In all likelihood, you will not have activities for all six categories. Really, that is not a problem. The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate your interests and passions in a few key categories. More is not better.

We recommend that you include a fair amount of detail (at least three to five sentences) in your descriptions. Be as specific as possible. If you did fundraising for a club, how much did you earn? If you played a leadership role in an activity, indicate what it was. This part is really important.

Admission committees prefer evidence of leadership rather than just membership in a ton of different clubs. If your sports team was highly successful, explain the level of competition that it faced. If your newspaper won an award, include the particulars. You want to be super specific with this list of your activities.

When it comes time to fill out the actual application, however, you will be limited in the amount of space that you have and you will have to streamline these descriptions. The Common Application, for example, requires you to limit your activity descriptions to two lines and you only get to include twelve activities total. But for right now, longer descriptions are better.

# What Do Admissions Committees Want?

Admissions committees are most interested in hearing about activities in which you are genuinely interested. They are not expecting to see a laundry list of extracurriculars. Rather, committees are most interested in finding out about activities to which you have demonstrated passion and commitment. This can take many different forms. For some students, perhaps an after-school job proved to be their primary passion. Other students might demonstrate their interests through music or sports or student government. The important thing to keep in mind, however, is that you don't need to participate in all types of activities. Rather, it is much more important to show true passion about a handful of pursuits.

Colleges ask about your activities in order to gain a sense of who you are as a person. Your list of activities, coupled with your personal statement, helps admissions committees see who you are. In particular, it helps them gain a sense about the types of qualities—leadership skills, musical ability, athletic prowess, international background, or business sense—that you can bring to their school.

Colleges will examine your activities list to determine your level of commitment. If you have participated in an activity—like playing a musical instrument—for many years, they want to see how you have progressed over time. They may be looking, for example, at how you demonstrated your dedication to music by gaining admission to your state's honor band. Admissions committees are also looking to see what kind of leadership positions you may have played in your activities. By taking on leadership roles, you have demonstrated a higher level of commitment than just being a member of a club or group.

Most importantly, colleges want to know why you have pursued the passions that you have. As you make your list for your student résumé, think about why you have been drawn to the activities in which you participate. Maybe you began studying music at an early age because one of your parents is a musician. Or perhaps you began tutoring younger students because you once struggled with math. No matter what the activity, there must be some reason that attracted you to it in the first place. Again, if you are trying to fake interest in an activity that you think the admissions committees want to see, they will see right through you because you don't have a legitimate explanation of why you are interested.

Many college applications require you to rank the order of your interest and commitment towards your extracurricular activities, so it is important to really think about how and why you first became interested in doing them. Moreover, colleges want to understand what you have gained from the experience of participating in these activities. You need to think carefully about why you love swimming or acting on stage or writing your blog, while also reflecting on what you have learned from the experience. As you do the student résumé worksheets, keep in mind why you are doing an activity and what you have taken away from it. This is important because it demonstrates your ability to reflect on your interests and passions.

<b>Worksheet: Detailed Activity Sheets</b>			
<b>School-Sponsored Activities</b>	<b>Years/Hours</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Employment</b>	<b>Years/Hours</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Community Service</b>	<b>Years/Hours</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Sports</b>	<b>Years/Hours</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Travel</b>	<b>Years/Hours</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Special Interests/Talents</b>	<b>Years/Hours</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Description</b>