

Applying to West Point

Thank you for your interest in applying for admission to the United States Military Academy at West Point, and in serving your country as an Army officer. Our volunteer Field Force in Northern Virginia is prepared to assist you in your efforts, and we welcome your questions about both the application process and about West Point in general. We also encourage you to review the information and advice in this rather lengthy document, and refer back to it as you work on completing each aspect of the Application, as well as the related nomination and medical requirements. Although the information herein is current when it was written, changes to requirements sometimes occur so please check the West Point Admissions website, www.westpoint.edu/admissions, periodically to ensure that you have the most up-to-date information.

How Does West Point Evaluate and Select Candidates for Admission?

West Point seeks and selects the best Candidates for its four-year academic, military, leadership and physical training of future small unit leaders for the U.S. Army. Because each incoming Class is limited to about 1200 young men and women, West Point evaluates each aspect of a Candidate's application, using a formula (described below) to calculate the Candidate's "Whole Candidate Score." Whole Candidate "points" come from 3 areas: Academic, Leadership and Physical Fitness.

30% of a Candidate's Whole Candidate Score comes from the results of his or her scores on the nationally standardized SAT and/or ACT tests. West Point "super scores" these, meaning that it only considers the Candidate's highest scores on either test. Accordingly, you should take both the SAT and the ACT, multiple times if necessary (as your time and budget allow) to improve your scores, starting in the Spring of your Junior year in high school. Some Candidates will do better on one or the other, so we recommend that you take both. Since the deadline for applying to West Point each year is January 31, West Point will accept SAT/ACT scores from their December/January tests, but not those thereafter. However, keep in mind that as part of their Nomination process (discussed below), Senators and Congressmen/women will likely have earlier SAT/ACT cutoffs for Nominations. We strongly recommend that you prepare for the SAT and ACT by using prep books, websites, practice tests, and/or tutoring programs or classes.

Another 30% of a Candidate's Whole Candidate Score comes from a review of the Candidate's high school transcript, and his or her corresponding grade point average (GPA) and/or class rank. It is imperative that you take (and do well in) classes in a "college prep track." Advanced Placement (AP), IB and Honors classes may carry additional weight in calculating your GPA.

A third 30% of a Candidate's Whole Candidate Score comes from an evaluation of the Candidate's leadership potential, character, and service to others, as these are very important qualities to help predict who will likely become successful Army leaders. The parts of your Application that are evaluated here are your Candidate Activities Record, your Teachers' Evaluations, your Candidate Essays, and the Interview Report from your Candidate Interview.

The Candidate Activities Record will show West Point both the Candidate's interests and activities and how well a Candidate has exhibited leadership potential and other character traits. Accordingly, you should participate in extracurricular activities that provide valuable leadership experiences and responsibilities. The following experiences are examples of activities that will both develop and demonstrate your leadership potential:

- Class, club, and/or student government activities and positions.
- Awards in academic societies, such as the National Honor Society.
- Participation and achievement in athletics. Team sports are generally better, as are varsity letters and being the Captain of a team.
- Participation and success in public speaking and other nonathletic activities.
- Participation and achievement in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Civil Air Patrol, and/or Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps.
- Membership and leadership in community or church organizations.
- Boys State/Girls State (held during the Summer after your Junior year, these programs are a great opportunity to show leadership potential).

Keep in mind that West Point considers it more valuable for you to achieve a leadership role and distinction in a specific activity rather than participation in several activities without any evidence of leadership achievement. Also, if you must work to provide financial assistance for your family, West Point views that working experience as a demonstration of your leadership potential even though it will likely limit your participation in school activities.

With regard to Teachers' Evaluations, 4 are required (from an English, a Math, a Physics or Chemistry, and a Physical Education teacher) and they are pretty straightforward. At the appropriate time, pick teachers that like you and are willing to provide a good recommendation for you.

Candidate Essays are also straightforward, but do require significant effort on your part. They are evaluated not only for substance (showing your desire and motivation to become an Army leader) but also for good communication skills (things like sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation do matter!). Generally, we recommend that you work on these and submit them during the Summer before or at the beginning of your Senior year, since the early submission of Essays is not only indicative of a Candidate's motivation, but it also affects when West Point Admissions may authorize a Candidate to undergo his or her Medical Exam (typically, West Point Admissions will only authorize Medical Exams for

“serious” Candidates who have completed substantial portions of their Application).

The Candidate Interview is normally conducted by a member of the Northern Virginia Field Force during the Summer before or at the beginning of the Candidate’s Senior year, after West Point Admissions has determined that a Candidate is “competitive” for admission (usually this is based upon SAT/ACT scores, high school transcripts, and other information already provided to Admissions as part of the Candidate’s Application). Note that not all Candidates will be contacted to do an interview, which is why it is important for you to continue to work on and try to improve the overall strength of your Application.

The final 10% of the Candidate’s Whole Candidate Score is based upon the results of the Candidate Fitness Assessment. This six-event test is “pass/fail,” meaning that if you do not pass the CFA overall then you cannot be qualified to receive an Offer of Admission (it is noteworthy that the failure to pass the CFA eliminates the largest number of candidates overall). Candidates should practice the events during the summer, and then take the CFA shortly after school starts. Practice each event separately, and then start combining the events in the order you will have to perform them. It is very helpful to watch the following instruction videos, and to read the CFA instructions carefully (they can be downloaded from the Candidate Portal that the Candidate establishes through the Admissions website, www.westpoint.edu/admissions), because if you do not perform the events exactly as required (especially the pull-ups/flexed arm hang and pushups, which must be video-recorded and the videos submitted to West Point Admissions for review), you will not receive credit for successfully completing the CFA:

Pull-Up Instructions - <https://youtu.be/Kkvpbh5eU7I>

Flexed Army Hang Instructions -https://youtu.be/5_3FJqujbx4

Pushup Instructions - <https://youtu.be/Lu4JpdWTEhQ>

When you are ready to take the CFA, it is your responsibility to schedule the test with someone authorized to administer the CFA. Normally this is with a physical education instructor at your high school, but JROTC and ROTC cadre and Field Force representatives can also administer the test. If you do not pass the CFA the first time, then Admissions will usually authorize a re-test so that you can try to improve your scores and pass the test. However, note that if your CFA administrator submits your CFA results after December 15th, then due to time constraints you will probably not be allowed another attempt.

Overview of the West Point Application Process

Candidates start the Application process by going to the Admissions website and filling out the Candidate Questionnaire online. Many Candidates do this in January of their Junior year, as part of their application to West Point’s Summer

Leaders Experience, but in any event you should do this no later than early Spring of your Junior year or as soon as possible thereafter.

Next, and in parallel with the West Point Admissions Application, you will need to obtain a Nomination from an authorized source. Every Candidate is eligible to apply for a Nomination from 4 different sources: the Representative from the Congressional District of the Candidate's legal residence (this is usually that of his or her parents, which may or may not be in Northern Virginia), the two Senators from the Candidate's state of legal residence, and the Vice President. Their submission requirements, processes, deadlines and/or informational contacts are on their respective websites, and are substantially similar (for example, they will require SAT/ACT scores, transcripts, and letters of recommendation), but they will differ in one or more aspects from each other, and from the Application requirements for West Point. Generally these Nomination applications are made available during the Spring of your Junior year, and must be completed and submitted by a specified date in the Fall of your Senior year (and this is very important: missing the required deadline by even one day will result in a rejection of your Nomination Application).

Additionally, some Candidates may be eligible to apply for a Presidential, ROTC/JROTC, or other service-connected Nomination. Information and the requirements for each of these can be found on the West Point Admissions website.

IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A NOMINATION, YOU CANNOT GET INTO WEST POINT.

Next, you should find out as much as you can about West Point, so that you will have a more informed idea of what you might be getting yourself into before you commit to the Application process and, if qualified, accept an Offer of Admission. West Point wants young men and women who want to be there, and are committed to serving their country. And the West Point experience is very challenging academically, physically, militarily and emotionally--it requires a 100% commitment not to quit when things get tough. If you cannot or are not committed to graduating and being commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, then you should forego applying to West Point so that you do not take a spot in the incoming Class that could (and should) go to someone who is.

In this regard, you should look for and attend an Information Briefing, Military Night, and/or Academy Day event in your area. Some of these are conducted by West Point Admissions, while others will have members of Northern Virginia's Field Force and Congressional staff present to answer questions and provide detailed information about the Nomination and Admissions application processes. You are not required to attend any of these events, of course, but the insights and information you may receive from one of them could prove to be invaluable. To find out about these events, talk to your high school's Career Counselor, or go to <http://www.westpoint.edu/admissions> (select the link to

“Admissions Events in Your Area”). You can also check the West Point Admissions Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/westpointadmissions/> for virtual information session videos and live events that occur.

After completing the Candidate Questionnaire, one of the first things most Candidates do to complete their requirements for their West Point Application is to take the ACT and/or SAT in the Spring of their Junior year. Please see the discussion earlier in this document regarding the importance of these tests. You should list West Point as one of the colleges on the ACT or SAT registration form, as well as list the Senators and Congressman you want your results to go to (go to their websites and get their codes), so that Admissions will receive your test results directly from the testing organizations (you cannot submit them to West Point yourself). West Point’s codes are 2976 for the ACT and 2924 for the SAT.

On or about June 1, Candidate Portals will be opened for many Candidates to begin each part of the actual Application for Admission to West Point. This is referred to as the “Second Step Kit.” Instructions for completion and submission of each part of the Application (such as Teachers Evaluations, Essays, and transcripts) will be provided in the Candidate Portal, and these instructions must be followed closely to ensure that the “Red X” shown next to an item can be turned into a “Green Checkmark,” indicating that the item has been successfully completed. We recommend that Candidates use the Summer before the start of their Senior year to complete as many parts of the Application as possible, especially the Candidate Essays, because once school starts up again in the Fall other things like classes, varsity sports, and club activities take up more of the Candidate’s time.

It is in your best interest to have your West Point Application completed as early as possible. We recommend that it be substantially complete before you go before the Nomination Boards of your Senators or Congressman (that makes a positive impression on the Nomination Board members), but certainly by no later than the end of November. West Point uses a “rolling admissions” process, meaning that as soon as your Application is complete, and you have a Nomination and are medically qualified, you will be considered for an Offer. Also, once your Application is complete you can schedule an overnight visit to West Point, where you will have an opportunity to attend classes, talk to Cadets about their experiences, and even sleep in the barracks and eat in the Mess Hall!

If you have questions or run into any difficulties with any aspect of the Application, the Northern Virginia Field Force members assigned to support Candidates from your high school can usually help answer the question or solve the problem. For special situations you should also contact West Point Admissions through your Candidate Portal and ask for help.

Regarding the Candidate Fitness Assessment, as discussed above we recommend training and preparing for it over the Summer, and then taking it in

the Fall when the weather is generally a bit cooler. However, you should not wait too long to take it; like the rest of the Application, it must be completed and the scores must be submitted by January 31, and injuries and/or the need for a re-test can cause Candidates to miss this deadline.

Although it is not a part of the Admissions Application, in addition to completing the Application and receiving a Nomination you must also take a medical examination and become medically qualified for admission to West Point. When West Point Admissions authorizes a medical exam for you (and as noted above they normally will not do so until you have completed the majority of your Application, including your Essays), you will receive instructions from the Department of Defense Medical Evaluation Review Board (DoDMERB), who will schedule an exam for you at an appropriate facility. A word of warning: medical exams sometimes take significant time, especially if DoDMERB requires additional testing or copies of your medical records. Therefore we recommend trying to complete it as soon as possible, and trying to get “medically qualified” as soon as possible, so that if any issues come up they will not prevent you from receiving an Offer (for example, certain medical conditions that are not military service restrictive may require a waiver before you can be deemed to be medically qualified and receive an Offer).

Throughout the Application process Candidates may receive additional instructions or requirements that must be met, such as turning in your Fall semester grades. You must comply with these additional requirements and instructions, or risk having your Application being rejected and your file closed.

Even after you complete every part of your Application, you always have an opportunity to improve your Whole Candidate Score by adding improved SAT or ACT scores, by adding additional awards and accomplishments (such as varsity letters), and perhaps by re-taking the Candidate Fitness Assessment. We strongly recommend that you update your Application whenever you can (you can do so all the way up to the January 31 Application deadline), because you never know if those one or two additional things can make the difference in receiving, or not receiving, an Offer.

As for letters of recommendation, they are not needed or required for your West Point Application, and they will not improve your Whole Candidate Score. However, many Congressmen and Senators do require them as part of their Nomination applications.

West Point Admissions recommends that you provide to them a one-page resume that covers all that you have done in grades 9-12. They will provide you with a simple format upon your request. This resume can tell things about you that are not part of the Application process, and could be a “tiebreaker” in their decision whether to provide an Offer to you.

Finally, remember that there are many members of the Northern Virginia Field Force to help you throughout the West Point Application process, and you should establish a relationship with those assigned to your school and show them how important going to West Point is to you. They too want you to be as competitive as possible for an appointment to West Point, and will often “go to bat” for Candidates who impress them but need a little help, whether it is to obtain a Congressional Nomination or to convince West Point Admissions to take a positive action on your behalf. But remember that they are only volunteers, and cannot and will not complete your Application for you. Nor will they try to convince you to accept an Offer to West Point—you need to decide “why West Point?” and is it the right “fit” for you. The West Point experience is unique and is not for everyone. Those who choose to accept its challenges and grow as a person and a leader will graduate as a second lieutenant armed with the all the tools they need to succeed, both as an Army officer and beyond.

Best of luck this upcoming year!

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