



Using a Holistic Admissions Rubric for Fair and Consistent Application Review

Various definitions agree that, at its core, holistic admissions is a method in which reviewers consider all available information to get a more complete picture of what an applicant can bring to a program. Implemented appropriately, it can support a fair and inclusive process that helps to identify applicants that effectively meet program needs and support institutional goals.

Programs conducting holistic admissions typically:

- use evidence and information from multiple sources to gauge applicants' knowledge, skills, experiences and personal attributes
- avoid using threshold (or cut) scores that are determined using only measures of academic experience and cognitive skills, such as undergraduate GPA and GRE[®] General Test scores, as that may prevent candidates with other desirable attributes from being considered
- give thought to the weighting of various components of the application, the order in which those components are reviewed, and who reviews them, to consider all information about an applicant in a fair and equitable way

Some programs use rubrics to help ensure that reviewers evaluate applicants consistently and in alignment with program goals. With such a tool, a range of points is assigned to each component of the application. Components considered more important can receive more points than components considered less important. And for each component, reviewers can assign a range of scores depending on whether the evidence received demonstrates the skills, experiences and attributes desired.

In the example below, provided for illustrative purposes, a program is intentionally prioritizing applicants who have research experience.

Component	Maximum Points
Research	5
Letters of Recommendation (LORs)	3
Work experience/CV	3
Undergrad curriculum	2
GPA	4
Personal statement	3
GRE [®] scores	4
Total	25

In the expanded version at right, more specific point values are assigned. If the applicant has at least one year of undergraduate research experience and has done research through a work or internship experience, that applicant gets three points. If the applicant has written articles that have been published, has participated in conference poster sessions, has given presentations on their research, or has received awards related to their research, an extra point or two can be earned.

In the right column, the program shows that it values quantitative reasoning and analytical writing skills above verbal reasoning skills by the way points are allocated. This program set the maximum points for GRE® Quantitative Reasoning scores at 2 points and is looking for applicants with higher scores in this area. Reviewers would also deduct 1 point for scores under 142. Conversely, the program shows that it values GRE® Verbal Reasoning scores less by awarding 1 point for all scores between 150 and 170.

The rubric could also recommend action for the program to take based on the total number of points awarded. See the bottom right box for an example of how this might work. While these are just examples, the idea is that by creating total point ranges, reviewers can more easily make recommendations for admittance that align to program goals.

A rubric is intended as the beginning of a discussion, not the source of a firm admit/deny decision. Faculty committees should reach final admissions decisions through discussion and consensus.

Other Sample Rubrics*

Admissions Rubrics

- [Indiana East University Master of Science in Education Program](#)
- [University of Virginia Engineering Ph.D.](#)
- [University of Wyoming Science Education Ph.D. Program](#)
- [Wayne State University Graduate Programs \(page 8\)](#)
- [West Texas A&M University Master of Speech-Language Pathology Program](#)
- [William Paterson University Professional Counseling Admissions Rubric](#)

Essay/Interview Rubrics

- [Columbia College Graduate Admissions Essay Rubric](#)
- [Concordia University Graduate Admission Essay Rubric](#)
- [Stony Brook University School of Professional Development Essay Rubric](#)
- [Washburn University Rubric for Graduate Admissions Writing Sample](#)

Component & Max Points	Points values
Research Max = 5	3 – 1 year UG + work/ internship research 2 – 1 year of UG research 0–1 – less than a year <i>1–2 extra for publications, posters, awards, etc.</i>
Letters of recommendation Max = 3	3 – very strong letters 2 – moderately strong letters 1 – below average letters -1 – red flag in letters
Work experience/CV Max = 3	2 – 2+ years related work experience 1 – 1–2 years related work experience <i>1 extra for volunteer work</i>
UG curriculum Max = 2	1 – extensive science coursework <i>1 extra for high UG challenge</i>
UGPA Max = 4	4 – 3.7 to 4.0 3 – 3.4 to 3.69 2 – 3.2 to 3.39 1 – 3.0 to 3.19
Personal statement Max = 3	2 – suggests strong fit 1 – suggests good fit 0 – unclear fit -1 – poor fit <i>1 extra for hardship, disadvantage</i>
GRE Quantitative Reasoning Max = 2	2 – 164–170 1 – 160–163 -1 – less than 142
GRE Analytical Writing Max = 2	2 – 5.0–6 1 – 4.0–4.5 -1 – less than 3
GRE Verbal Reasoning Max = 1	1 – 150–170 0 – <150
Total Score:	20–25 – Strong admit 17–19 – Admit 14–16 – Probable admit 10–13 – Probable deny 0–9 – Deny

*Note that ETS has not empirically validated these rubrics. They are provided as examples only.