

Yes, what you post on social media can hurt, and help, the college admissions process

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(TNS)

Hey, all you college-bound kids: What's the easiest thing you can do to impress prospective schools? It's not your GPA. It's not the debate team. It's your Facebook – and your Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, Vine, and any other social media feeds that colleges can see. And yes, they're looking. Here are answers to the most important questions about what colleges want to see.

—Should I delete my social media or make it all private?

Making it private is a good idea anyway. On most social media, a private account means your name won't come up in search results, and it limits your digital footprint (how much stuff about you is available on the web). You don't have to delete your accounts, though. Colleges expect prospective students to have social media.

—Do I have to delete every single party pic of me and my friends?

No. Actually, colleges like to see that you're a well-rounded person with a healthy social life. The main thing that could hurt you is posts that reflect poor judgment. Get rid of any photos and videos that contain inappropriate behavior such as drinking, sexy stuff, and lots of swearing — and no hostile speech, rudeness, or negative tweets about a school that you're applying to.

—The college I'm interested in contacted me through Facebook. Doesn't that mean that they're cool and won't care about my "youthful indiscretions"?

Nope. College marketers use social media to reach teens (and maybe to seem cool, too). But be careful: Replying to the school through your social media (instead of your email account) allows them to view your account. So make sure it's a fairly good reflection of who you are before you start the process.

—I once got in a public war of words with someone not on my social media but on another online forum. Will that hurt me?

It might. If you posted under the same username that you use on your other public social media, there's a record of your rants and hostile posts, and it could come up when the school Googles you. You can't go back in time and revise what you wrote. So make sure that the primary account you want

the college to see is clean. And if you feel like sounding off in a public forum, make your posts constructive and cordial.

—Will the weird stuff I like on other people's social media reflect negatively on me?

Probably not – unless it's illegal, extremely antisocial, or disturbing and it makes up the bulk of your feed.

—Could the school look poorly on me if I follow provocative figures on social media?

It's unlikely that they would use this against you unless the majority of people you follow are very extreme and highly controversial. That could show that you're not open to different points of view, which could be problematic in college. If you're interested in a topic, seek out a range of opinions. Also, follow people who are influential in the area you're interested in – including the colleges you're applying to. It will help you learn about the field – and hey, if the school notices, it shows you're serious.

—What should I do if I think a school unfairly disqualified me because of my social media?

Because colleges receive so many qualified applications, they're typically looking at social media to see if it tips the scales in anyone's favor – not to dig up dirt. Maybe another applicant's social media just made that person seem like a better match for the school. But if you think a skeleton in your Facebook closet came back to haunt you, you can contact admissions and find out.

—Do my likes, followers, and other indicators of social media popularity help me or hurt me in the college admissions process?

If you've actively pursued a specific passion — say, music, photography, or even the evolution of the shoe from ancient times to present – and you've cultivated an active, engaged audience on social media, that's a plus. College admissions will see that you have drive and initiative. On the other hand, having a big audience for more typical random teen interests, such as internet memes and cat videos, may not even register (and won't be held against you).



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(continued)*

—Should I groom my social media specifically to look good for colleges?

Some colleges do want to see social media that's more résumé-like. You can ask admissions how much it will be considered. For the most part, your social media should reflect who you really are – well, maybe a slightly spiffier you. Make sure you don't exaggerate your achievements, though! (Colleges fact-check awards and accolades.) You probably won't be happy at a college that chooses you based on a sanitized, highly curated version of you. But you should demonstrate that you're aware that someone you want to impress is viewing.

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