

Tips to be competitive for WP

January 2017

You are receiving these instructions and tips because you have communicated to West Point that you have an interest in applying for admission to the academy after you graduate from high school in 2018. This is a long document, but is directed at unraveling the complexity of the academy application process. Read it in sections, put it down, read it again.

CLASS OF 2022 (Being Competitive)

The application process for West Point or any of the Service Academies can be daunting. Let me begin by saying that there are 2 processes that you must negotiate simultaneously – The West Point Admission Process and the Nomination process. There are some overlapping requirements for both processes, but you must submit separately to each. The purpose of this paper is to assist you in getting the right requirements to the right place on time and to make you as competitive as possible for an appointment to West Point.

This paper is intended for HS Juniors. The earlier you read this paper and start the process the better. Having said that, the dates reflected below are hard dates for HS Juniors who needed to review all of the below and the Application Timeline on the westpoint.edu/admissions website to begin positioning themselves to be competitive for an appointment.

Class of 2022 – The year you would graduate from West Point. This means you will enter West Point in the summer of 2018, graduate and receive a commission 47 months later.

No later than 28 February 2018 – All WP admissions files must be complete, including nominations and teacher/employer evaluations. Nomination application deadlines for Senators and Congressmen can vary so you need to check with the office of each for exact deadlines. It is in your best interest to have your West Point application completed by mid September. That means that you must have a CFA score in your file, your medical (physical) completed, first set of transcripts submitted, teacher evaluations and employer evaluations completed, essays submitted and SAT/ACT scores in the file for the first look. The Admissions Officer in the Northeast Region can authorize a retest of the Candidate Fitness Assessment (CFA) if you need one and request a waiver for some medical conditions. If you do not show that you are seriously considering WP (file not near completion), the Admissions Officer will not authorize the CFA retest or seek the Medical waiver if needed. If you wait too long to show file completion, you may not get notification for a DoDMERB medical physical.

West Point has had to cut back on the number of offers of appointment due to the low attrition of previous classes and reductions in the military due to troop withdrawals and funding. Congress is demanding the Corps comply with the 4400 cadet authorization. WP will offer almost 1200 appointments this year for the class of 2021. You can expect the numbers to be about the same for the Class of 2022.

USMA does not have a rolling admissions policy. What this means is that offers of appointment will begin in late January, continuing with the majority offered in February and March, and the few offers will go out April and May, and a very few final offers will go to candidates in June.

Letters of Assurance (selected very few) will go out early in the Admissions cycle to the most qualified Candidates who have everything in their file, so it behooves you to complete your application as soon as possible. Letters of Assurance (LOA) are letters of conditional early acceptance.

Letters of Encouragement will be given this year as they were last year. These letters state that a candidate is exceptional and has promising potential for appointment, but no promises are made. An overnight visit to the academy is authorized for recipients of LOEs.

West Point Application Process Overview.

West Point seeks the best candidates. WP internally ranks candidates using a Whole Candidate Score (WCS). The WCS comes from 3 areas: Academic, Leadership and Physical Fitness. 60% of your overall score comes from Academics with the focus on the national standardized test scores and your class standing, 30% on your leadership (extracurricular activities, leadership positions held and includes your participation in sports activities as well as Teacher Evaluations) and 10% on your Candidate Fitness Assessment (you must pass the CFA). I cannot stress the importance of doing well on your national test scores (more below). WP understands that there are only 168 hours in a week. Most is taken with the high school curriculum. So the rest of your week is important (the extracurricular activities); getting physically fit and maintaining a certain level of fitness is your responsibility and you are expected to prioritize getting yourself in shape.

To be competitive for the leadership portion: You should participate in extracurricular activities that provide valuable leadership experiences and responsibilities. This will help you prepare for the leadership development training you will receive at West Point. The following high school experiences will develop and demonstrate your leadership potential:

- Class, club, or student government position.
- Awards in academic societies, such as the National Honor Society.
- Participation and achievement in athletics. Team sports are better.
- 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, or Jr. Reserve Officer Training Corps.
- Membership and leadership in community or church organizations.
- Boy's State/Girls State (if you are not aware of this program, don't miss this opportunity)

The United States Military Academy considers it more valuable for you to achieve a leadership role and distinction in a specific activity rather than participation in a number of activities without any evidence of leadership achievement. If you have to 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 limit participation in school activities.

The last accepted SAT/ACT scores for your West Point Candidate file are the SATs taken late Jan 2018 and the Mid December 2017 or early Feb 2018 ACTs. The Senators and Congressmen have different cutoffs depending on their interview schedules. Be aware of the dates required by each nominating source. If you have new scores after the congressional deadline, bring your new scores in an official form to the nomination board interview. They may allow the new scores to be included into their process.

Steps to Success

1. Start Admissions Candidate file by filling out the Candidate Questionnaire online at usma.edu/admissions. You should do this in the early spring of the Junior year or as soon as possible thereafter. Candidate Questionnaires are open to Juniors mid January of 2017.
2. Apply for a nomination to Congressional Representative, Senators, Presidential (if eligible) and JROTC/ROTC (if eligible) and Vice President. You should do this in the spring and summer of the Junior year or as soon as possible thereafter. For Congressional and Senatorial nominations, the process may vary slightly. Their process, deadlines and/or informational contacts are on their websites. All require letters of recommendation and an ACT or SAT score. Additionally, the candidate must submit resumes/list of accomplishments and a list of activities in which he/she has participated. All require the candidate to submit essays to questions they propose. Submit as early as possible and follow up to ensure submission of all required documentation by their deadline. For the military related nomination – the West Point candidate file software preprints a sample letter. The candidate must print, sign, and mail with the supporting documentation to WP. I encourage each of you to go online to the appropriate website and read the requirements and use the online application and print outs. Read the requirements carefully. Some want it paper clipped and some want it stapled while others don't want you to do anything to it. "ATTENTION TO DETAIL".

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

3. I strongly encourage you to attend an Academy Day in your area. You are not required to attend, but information on all academies is available in one location. You will also get a chance to meet some of the congressional staff people that handle nominations. This is a great place to have your face associated with a name even though your meeting these people will have no bearing on the outcome of getting a nomination, but might make the communications between you and the congressional office a bit easier. The best information they will provide at this point will be a nomination packet and when their requirements are due.

4 Go to the link below on occasion and see if there is an event scheduled that will give you an opportunity to ask questions about the admissions process.

<http://www.usma.edu/admissions> (select the link to "Admissions Events in Your Area")

5. Complete ACT and/or SAT testing. List USMA as one of the colleges on the registration form as well as the Senators and Congressman (go to their websites and get their codes). West Point's codes are 2976 for the ACT and 2924 for the SAT. I recommend taking both the SAT and ACT at least one time, but as many times as the schedule and budget will allow. Some students find the ACT test easier to take. Remember that if you take the ACT, you must sign up for the writing portion when you register. Also, each time you take one of the tests, WP will take your best score in each category. Studies show that the more times you take these tests; you usually improve by a few points. After 3 or so tests, your scores will level out. The best way (increase your individual test score by ~100 points) to improve is to take a one-on-one tutored prep course. A less effective alternative is to go to the bookstore and find a prep book for the ACT or the SAT with practice tests or take similar programs online, but the results are less dramatic (individual scores may be improved by ~30 points). Test dates are on the testing service website. Some candidates ask "what score is considered competitive by West Point"? Target standards derived from recent class profiles, indicate that a 650 in Math and 650 in Verbal are competitive scores. Significantly lower scores put chances of appointment at risk.

6. Candidate Fitness Assessment (CFA). Must be completed and score submitted by 28 Feb 2018. Candidates can download a test form and instructions. A physical education instructor normally administers this test. Candidates should practice during the summer and take shortly after school starts. It is the candidate's responsibility to schedule the test with an instructor. Most JROTC and ROTC cadre know how to administer the test. In some special cases, Field Force Reps can administer the test. Practice each event separately and then start combining the events in the order you will have to perform them for the test. Remember to record the pull ups/flexed arm hang and push ups of the CFA. **START EARLY!!**

7. Qualifying medical exam. When the admissions portal reopens (end of Jul 2017) in the form of the Second Step Kit (SSK), and if the candidate is deemed competitive, he/she will receive instructions from the Department of Defense Medical Examination Review Board (DoDMERB) and will schedule an exam at an appropriate facility. West Point has been using the completion of the required SSK essays as a measure of your seriousness. No completed essays, no early DoDMERB authorization. If you can, get the medical done during the summer or early fall. If DoDMERB requires additional testing or copies of medical records, they will request them. Get completed as soon as possible or by their deadline. Getting medically "qualified" as soon as possible is recommended. Getting evaluated early permits the system the time to grant waivers of certain medical conditions that are not military service restrictive.

8. Request for School Transcript. Ensure the contact information for the school official submitting transcripts to include transcripts for the 7th semester (1st semester Senior year) is complete in the candidate file. Candidate needs to make sure that transcripts are sent after the end of the Junior year and the first semester of the Senior year.

9. Candidate Statement – These 3 essays need be completed online before your file will be evaluated. DO YOUR ESSAYS FIRST!! I recommend you do them in conjunction with writing your essays for the Congressional nominations. Instructions come with the opening of the SSK.

10. School Official's Evaluations. Four required – math instructor, English instructor, lab science (physics or chemistry), and Physical Education Instructor. Sometimes Biology will qualify, but ask for the variance before assuming it is OK. I recommend contacting the instructors during the 2nd semester of your Junior year and give them a heads up that USMA will contact them so they can complete the form online. You submit the email addresses for the 4 teachers through your candidate electronic file. West Point will send the evaluation link to each of the 4 teachers. The candidate should reconnect with the 4 instructors in the summer or early in the new school year and ask them to do it ASAP.

11. Employer's Evaluation. Candidates must print off from the website and fill out the top portion and give it to the employer to complete and submit. This will not be available until your SSK is open. If you work in the summer, have your summer employer fill out one evaluation. If you work in the school year, have that employer fill out an evaluation.

12. Interview. You may be asked to have an interview if the Admissions Officer deems it necessary, but interviews are not required for an appointment. A cadet at Summer Leadership Experience (SLE) can do this if you attend. A Field Force Rep. can also do interviews. Contact me to schedule an appointment. Moms and Dads may attend. The first part of the interview will be with the family. The second part will be with the candidate only. I have access to your candidate file. I can see what you have completed and what is missing. WP is seeking those who have a burning desire to attend.

13. Summer Leadership Experience (SLE) is a one-week session at West Point given in June (there are two sessions). If you apply, you may receive an offer based on your SAT or PSAT performance. This is a competitive selection process. Apply early, the deadline is April 1, but the offers usually go out in February and March. Going to SLE is not essential to receiving an appointment.

14. Download a copy of the Admissions Timeline from the admissions website. Make sure you go to each Congressman's or Senator's website to get all of their requirements and to your candidate file to make sure you have completed everything. I have tried to simplify the process for you. The Admissions Timeline can be used as a checklist.

15. Even if you have your West Point candidate file completed by 15 Sep, YOU ARE NOT DONE. I cannot over emphasize the importance of updating your file constantly. Every time you take a College Board exam, send the score. Every time you receive a special honor, send it to the NE Regional Commander in an email to be entered into your candidate file. If you start a new job, add it. If you obtain a new leadership position, add it. UPDATE, UPDATE, UPDATE UNTIL THE 28 FEB.

16. Letters or Recommendation. They are not needed for your WP file. They are required by Congressmen and the Senators. Can you send letters of recommendation to WP? Yes. They will not count toward your overall candidate score, but if you are tied with another candidate or you are borderline acceptable for an offer of an appointment, they might help get you the appointment.

17. West Point Admissions recommends that you do a one-page resume that covers all that you have done in grades 9-12. West Point will provide you with a simple format. This resume can be a tiebreaker and also tell things about you that are not part of the application process. Do the resume with others, like your parents. They will remember things that you think are insignificant.

18. I am here to help you, but not to do your application for you. If you show me that you are working to get things accomplished, I will go the extra mile.

19. At the appropriate time, I will provide you with some insights on how best to prepare for the Congressional Nomination Boards. If you want these tips, ask me.

20. Good luck!