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## DEVELOPING A TOP-TIER UNIVERSITY APPLICATION PORTFOLIO

Getting into a top-tier university is not simply a matter of having great grades or test scores. Those are undoubtedly the most important criteria, but other criteria matter as well. Extracurricular activities, community service, sports, and internships can all make a difference. A compelling college application portfolio explains to a university admissions team what a student is passionate about, and the ways in which they have shown leadership, ambition and dedication.

For parents of secondary school students, the goal isn't to encourage your child to maximize the number of activities they do. Instead, starting as early as Grade 9, help them focus their attention on a few areas of interest and aptitude, keep track of accomplishments, and tell their story effectively. That makes it easier for students to build an outstanding college application portfolio without overwhelming themselves.

### 1. FOCUS ON YOUR INTERESTS

Too often, students build a college application portfolio by accident, doing activities because a friend is doing them, or because a parent pushes them into something. By Grade 9, students are developing a distinct set of interests. If they focus on these, they will start building their portfolio effectively. Top-tier universities care a lot about understanding what the student is passionate about. Taking a personality or an interest test on the UGC's career and university research online platform [Unifrog](#) can help. If a student's interests are investigative, they could do science projects or attend science camps. For students whose passion is more artistic, they could explore painting, music or other artistic endeavors.

### 2. CREATE CONNECTIONS

If a student loves science, it makes sense to take a lot of science classes in secondary school, including *Shuyuan* courses and opportunities and also external or summer school programs like ones offered at the [John Hopkins Center for Talented Youth](#), [the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education](#) and the gifted and talented centers at local universities such as the [University of Hong Kong](#), the [Hong Kong University of Science and Technology](#), and the [Chinese University of Hong Kong](#). These programs can help students win admission into a top-tier university for their chosen subject. If a student loves

art, perhaps they would take courses in sculpture or painting. Then they can use their extracurricular activities and community service to enhance and build on those interests. For example, one student who played violin in the school concert band also played his violin for elderly residents at a local home for the elderly. A student who loved chess taught chess to younger children. These are great ways to use community service to do something you love and help others at the same time. A university admissions officer who sees this on a resume knows it's a genuine labor of love, and not just a way to pad a college application.

### 3. TELL A COMPELLING STORY

A student's college application essay, when they write it, tells one part of their story. Make sure the portfolio that goes with it reinforces that story and fills in the details. If the story told is of an introverted student who feels much more at home in a research lab than as part of a sales team, their portfolio is most effective if it shows how they spent their summers being a writer or working on science projects. If the essay showcases their concern for the environment and planet, then their college application portfolio would be most effective if it showed their work on a local green initiative in Hong Kong or elsewhere.

### 4. STAND OUT

Many universities will give a leg up to students who send in additional material that indicates accomplishment or talent. If a student worked with a university professor on a research project, did an interesting internship, or excels at an unusual activity, they should include it in their application. If the university's application makes that difficult, write a letter to the admissions officer. Students shouldn't be excessive in their communication, but be sure to demonstrate their gifts and talents.

Finally, the top-tier university admissions process is complex. One of the ways in which this complexity appears is that universities want to know who a student really is. That can make the process seem overwhelming. But with some mindful attention, a great college application portfolio can make the process less stressful for parents and less overwhelming for students.