

APPLYING FOR

# OKLAHOMA ACADEMIC ALL-STATE

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A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL & STUDENTS



Oklahoma Foundation  
*for Excellence*

Updated September 2025



# INTRODUCTION

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Academic All-State is one of Oklahoma’s most prestigious student honors. The Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, a nonpartisan nonprofit that recognizes and encourages academic excellence, honors only 100 public school seniors each year.

The selection committee evaluates applicants through a rigorous process based on academic achievement, leadership and community service, as well as letters of recommendation and an essay. The committee is made up of a diverse group of business, education and civic leaders along with past honorees, and it works independently of other OFE activities.

To apply for Academic All-State, students must meet one of the following criteria:

- Composite ACT score of at least 30
- Combined SAT evidence-based reading & writing and math score of at least 1370
- Selection as a National Merit Scholarship Program semifinalist

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## **1. What if a student does not meet any of the criteria but is trying to raise test scores?**

Those who are still waiting on test scores that enable them to meet the criteria are welcome to begin an application. However, they will not be able to submit it until they are able to check that they meet one of the criteria.

## **2. Do superscores count?**

No. Standardized test scores must be from a single test date on a national or district-contracted testing day.

## **3. How does a student submit an application?**

Students must hit the red submit button at the end of the application in order for an application to be considered. Applications that are completed but not submitted will not be considered.

## **4. Can a parent, counselor or other school official complete the application for a student?**

No. Students must fill out their own applications.

## **5. Can a student have someone look over their essay?**

Yes. We encourage students to have someone proofread their essay before submitting it.

## **6. In what format should test scores be submitted?**

Scores must be uploaded in PDF format as part of the application and not emailed. The PDF can be a screenshot of the ACT/SAT website or a scan of printed scores. If a student's transcript lists test scores, they are welcome to upload it in the test scores field. The application cannot be submitted without a test score being uploaded.

## **7. Can a student get a deadline extension?**

No. In order to keep to a tight schedule and be mindful of volunteer judges' time, OFE is not able to extend deadlines.

## **8. Is it possible to get a deadline extension on submitting a student's transcript or reference letters?**

No. Students' applications will not be considered if any part has not been submitted by the deadline.

## **9. Can you tell counselors or principals which of their students have started or submitted applications?**

Yes, just email [hmcghee@ofe.org](mailto:hmcghee@ofe.org) and let us know what school.

## **10. If a transcript or reference letter has been requested, does that mean the application has been submitted?**

Not necessarily. Once they have completed all the information they are required to enter, the students need to hit the submit button on the form.

## **11. What is the process of uploading the student's transcript?**

The student provides the email address of a school official who has access to their transcript. That person will receive an automated email with instructions and a link to visit to upload the transcript and verify the student's eligibility. Transcripts must be in PDF format.

## **12. What is the process of submitting a recommendation letter?**

The student provides the email addresses of two people who are not family members that they want to submit a recommendation letter. Those people will receive an automated email with instructions on how to submit the letter. Students should try to get letters from someone who knows them well. A personalized letter that highlights in detail what makes a student exceptional will make a stronger impression on judges than a form letter.

## **13. What if someone doesn't receive the email about the transcript or reference letter?**

First, please check junk mail/spam folders, then verify with the student that they input the email address correctly. If not, they can update it and resend the email. If the email still doesn't come through, school officials should request that their IT departments whitelist system-generated email by following the instructions in [this article](#). Alternatively, they can have the student update the email address to a personal email address.



## TIPS ON WRITING A SUCCESSFUL ESSAY

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- **Have someone proofread it.** While students must write the essays themselves, we do encourage them to have a teacher, counselor or other trusted professional proofread it.
- **Use most of the word count.** Essays are limited to 500 words. While there is not a required minimum, we find that students who use most of the allotted words tend to score better.
- **Cut and paste as plain text.** Students may find it easier to type their essay in Microsoft Word or some other word processor software and then paste it into the application. If doing so, students should paste the text in unformatted/plain text to avoid formatting errors.

# SAMPLE ESSAYS

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On the following pages, you will find three essays written by members of the 2025 Academic All-State class that were among the highest-scored by the judges.

The essays were written for the following prompt:

*“A man who does not think for himself does not think at all.” — Oscar Wilde*

*Looking back on your education in public schools, what specific teacher, assignment, or circumstance prompted you to think for yourself? In what ways did this opportunity for growth impact you and your future?*

Please check the application portal to see this year’s essay prompt.

## SAMPLE 1

Rocky Balboa probably wasn’t meant to be an inspiration for kids from underfunded debate teams.

And I’m definitely much nerdier looking than Sylvester Stallone. But I had my own Apollo Creed to battle: competing in a national circuit tournament—a competition no one from our team had ever attended. No more hearing that Oklahomans “weren’t competitive outside of the state.” I was going to compete at a national circuit tournament. On my own. And no one could stop me.

Not long after I promised this to myself, I watched a video of a national circuit round and realized I was way out of my league. Critical epistemology? Hegelian dialectic? I had never known these words existed, much less how to debate them in a four minute speech. The deck had been stacked against me. A quick search would reveal that a supermajority of top national debaters came from elite prep schools with dozens of coaches, not small Oklahoma teams running on pocket lint and the power of friendship.

It was time to turn on Eye of the Tiger. I found a tournament in Houston I could afford to attend, spent all my Christmas money to sign up, and began to prep. I found a website, [opencaselist.com](http://opencaselist.com), that published every argument on the national circuit. Reading it became my lifeline. The arguments that had initially confused me began to click. The topic expanded before my eyes as I read cases on Indigenous perspectives, international relations critiques, and government spending concerns. I remember reading an argument connecting disabilities to Iraq and thinking it was too complicated for me, until a debate friend in Texas explained it over text. I was learning to think for myself.

With both my Oklahoma debate knowledge and my newfound national circuit research, I began to fuse the two perspectives into something totally unique. While my strategy of combining French philosopher Jean Beadrillard with quotes from The Matrix may not have been the most conventional approach, it was one only I could have executed. A few weeks later, I arrived at the tournament, and ended up doing better than I expected. My state level experience paid off: Oklahoma’s focus on clear delivery meant I ranked 6th speaker at a national tournament of 50 people!

More than my placement, I had proved something to myself. I could. I could grind out research and understand tricky concepts. I could be alone and afraid, but do it anyway. I could beat a stacked deck with enough grit. Being at that tournament put me in touch with my own capability in a way I’d never experienced before.

Back in Oklahoma, I no longer limit myself to basic arguments, but instead explore vast landscapes of argumentation and critical perspectives. I’ve helped my teammates understand difficult arguments I first encountered in Houston, and encouraged them to debate with more than just the standard opinions. Our wealth—not of funds, but of knowledge—exceeds any team I’ve ever seen. And that’s alright with me.

## **SAMPLE 2**

The International Baccalaureate Program I'm in describes the Extended Essay (EE) as "an independent, self-directed piece of research, finishing with a 4,000-word paper," mandatory for all students. But to my 11th grade self, the EE was my greatest academic dilemma. Until that point, my education had been linear—a precisely plotted course, in a single direction, on a Cartesian plane. The EE was entirely different. It felt as though I'd been lifted from that line and plopped into an infinite space, a solitary point in a multidimensional world. I was excited by the freedom, but found myself lost in its vastness.

Instead of confronting the problem, I did the typical thing an academic does: watch reruns of my favorite television series: *Friends*. It was during one episode that a single line sparked the curiosity I didn't know I needed. In Season 2, Episode 30, while Chandler and his pals are stranded at a rest stop, he gets caught throwing an empty cigarette pack on the ground, and protests, "I thought maybe if I littered, that Crying Indian might come along and save us."

At first, I assumed "Crying Indian" was an outdated, offensive term. But after a quick google search, I learned that it was a nickname for Iron Eyes Cody, star of an iconic 1970s anti-littering PSA. I fell down a rabbit hole of online Reddit threads, YouTube analyses, and articles dissecting the cultural and political impacts of the campaign. By the time I went to bed that night, I had my question: "To what extent did the 'Crying Indian' campaign lay the foundation for political and social environmental sustainability regarding pollution?"

Yet again, I found myself lost. There was no study guide, no predetermined methodology to look to. I was both the mapmaker and the traveler, navigating uncharted academic seas. Should I examine ethnographies? Analyze statistical trends? Conduct a rhetorical study of the PSA itself? Each option enticed me, but rather than choosing one, I did them all.

With the guidance of my teachers and the resources of our library, I transformed into an interdisciplinary researcher: part anthropologist, part statistician, part literary critic. Each path I explored uncovered new layers of understanding, and each discovery furthered my excitement. The more I learned, the more I realized how much there was to learn. The questions I asked yielded not just answers, but more questions, and the 4,000 words that once seemed insurmountable came to me easily.

The EE taught me that learning is a boundless journey, the world is my canvas, and education is my paintbrush. Sharing my findings with friends, hearing their stories and discoveries, showed me that knowledge is a team effort, rather than a race. As I look to the future, I now see that every question is a doorway to endless opportunity and every answer is an invitation to ask more. I hope to always step through, eager to grow, explore, and reimagine the world around me.

### SAMPLE 3

Numbers spoke to me before words did. In middle school MATHCOUNTS competitions, I'd solve problems with mechanical precision — manipulating equations like a miniature machine. What looked like mathematical talent was really pattern recognition: spot the problem type, recall the formula, plug in the numbers. I was throwing around equations without understanding why they worked.

During the first week of AP Calculus BC, a deceptively simple equation challenged my approach: the limit definition of a derivative. Like always, I quickly copied it into my notebook and memorized its parts:  $h$  approaching zero, the quotient of differences. But as I worked through practice problems, something nagged at me. Why did this cryptic formula perfectly capture the slope at a single point? For the first time, I found myself concerned not with how to solve problems, but why their solutions worked. The equation wasn't just a tool — it was my window into mathematical truth.

Competition math introduced me to elegant proofs through unlikely sources. Take the Chicken McNugget Theorem - a playful name for a profound mathematical concept. If McDonald's only sells nuggets in boxes of 4 and 9, what's the largest number of nuggets you can't order? This seemingly trivial question opens a door into number theory. Through proofs, we discover that 23 is the answer - and more importantly, why it must be 23. These weren't just clever solutions; they were exercises in mathematical reasoning that transformed how I approached problems.

In AP Computer Science, this mathematical reasoning resurfaced in merge sort — an algorithm that initially baffled me. The code recursively splits arrays in half until they're sorted, then merges them back together. The process seemed needlessly complex until I understood its mathematical logic through proofs. Just as the McNugget Theorem revealed patterns in numbers, merge sort showed me how mathematical logic applies to computational efficiency.

My high school's support for concurrent enrollment at OU helped me push these connections further. In discrete mathematics, numbers became almost irrelevant as we explored the abstractions of logical structures. Proofs weren't just verifications - they were the building blocks of math's true nature. This abstraction redefined problem-solving for me: beyond calculation, it was a universal language for precise reasoning. Today, as I research parallel computing, I find myself drawing on this foundation — using mathematical logic to orchestrate multiple processors in computational harmony. What began in public school as pattern recognition has evolved into a deeper appreciation for the elegant structures underlying both mathematics and computation.