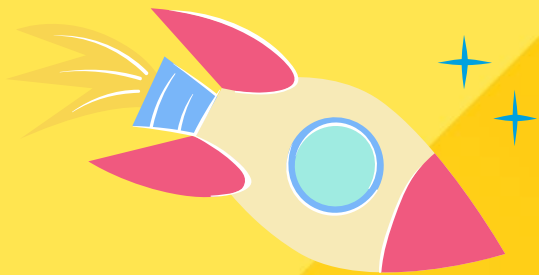

Charting the course: Storytelling through awards and activities



September 2026

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Agenda

- ★ Basics and overview
 - ★ Context matters
 - ★ Identifying meaningful experiences
 - ★ Crafting effective descriptions
 - ★ Busting myths
 - ★ Examples
 - ★ Counselor pro tips
- The pre-check
 - Liftoff
 - Stage separation
 - Orbiting
 - Descent
 - Reentry
 - Touchdown

Purpose

This section allows students to highlight the ways they have demonstrated their commitments in and outside the classroom; sharing the broader context of their lives by showing the time they devoted to their passions and the awards and honors they earned for their contributions.



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**“It’s not bragging if you
can back it up”
-Muhammad Ali**



You are in a unique position to motivate!

- ❖ Provide direction
- ❖ Reinforce self-advocacy
- ❖ Help students dig deeper into their experiences
- ❖ Emphasize context, consistency and clarity
- ❖ Remind students not to be humble about their accomplishments





Basics & application overview

**Mission Control:
"Conducting the
Pre-Check"**



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How many activities and awards can students report?

- ❖ Students can enter up to 20 max
- ❖ UC campuses have no preference for specific types of involvement

Categories:

1. Awards or honors
2. Educational preparation programs
3. Extracurricular activities
4. Other coursework
5. Volunteer/community service
6. Work experience



Activity details



The details

- ❖ 350 characters max to describe each activity
- ❖ Do not need full sentences
- ❖ Focus on their roles and responsibilities



What's the name of the activity? *

Model United Nations

What did you do? *

Think about your experience, and what you accomplished and learned. We'd also like to know if you've held a leadership role, which can mean more than just a title — it can mean being a mentor to others, acting as a point-person in charge of a specific task, or taking a lead role in organizing an event or project.

350 characters remaining

Available categories



Awards or Honors

- Level of recognition: local, regional, state, national, etc.
- Academic and non-academic
- What are the eligibility requirements for this award or honor?
- What did you do to achieve this award or honor?

Educational Preparation Programs

- College readiness preparation
- AVID, EAOP, Upward Bound, etc.
- Briefly describe the program

Extracurricular Activities

- Clubs, hobbies, sports, etc.
- Anything students have not had a chance to tell us about
- What did you do?

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Available categories cont.



Volunteer / Community Service

- Donated time and effort WITHOUT monetary compensation
- Tutoring students, helping at a food bank, etc.
- Please describe the organization, program, school or group?
- What did you do?

Other Coursework

- Non A-G Courses.
- Trainings and certificate programs and classes.
- What is the name of the course?
- Briefly describe the course.

Work Experience

- Family business
- After-school job
- Creating a side hustle
- Where did you work?
- Please briefly describe the company or organization where you worked.
- What was your job title?
- What were your job responsibilities?



Time commitment

Consistency and commitment

Students will enter their activities in 9th – 12th grade

- Includes spring semester of senior year
- After 12th is for a gap year(s)

Students will include time spent on the activity

- Average hours per week
- Weeks per year

When did you participate in the program? *

If you participated in the program during the summer, select the grade you were in before that summer.

- ☐ 9th grade
- ☒ 10th grade
- ☐ 11th grade
- ☐ 12th grade
- ☐ After 12th grade

How much time did you spend on this activity? *

It's ok to estimate, but try to be as accurate as possible.

Hours spent per week:

7

Weeks spent per year:

10



Context matters

**Mission Control:
"Preparing for
Liftoff"**



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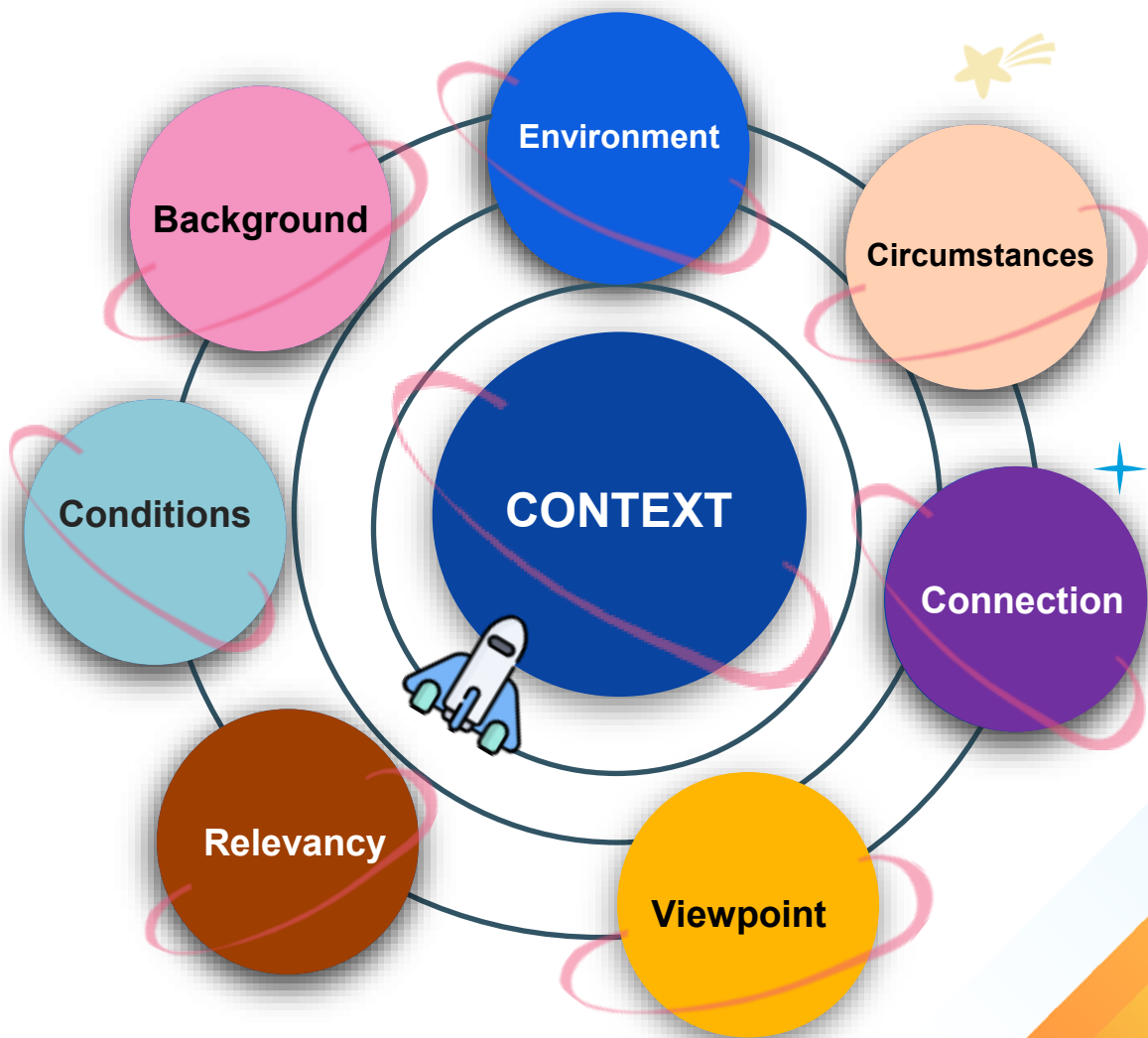
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Context

CONTEXTUALIZATION

When something is contextualized, it is placed in an **appropriate setting** and given **proper consideration**.

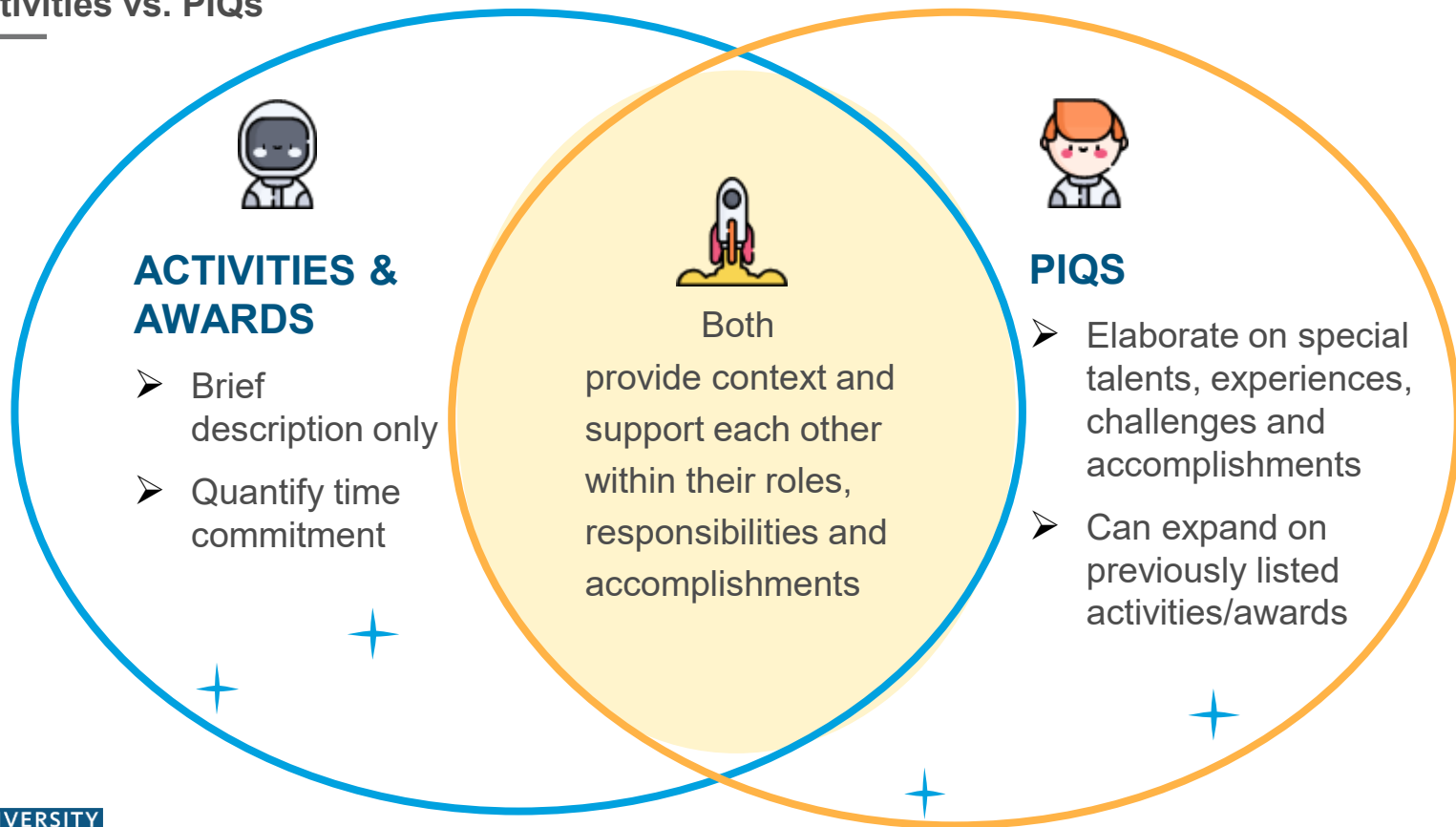


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Activities vs. PIQs





Identifying meaningful experiences

**Mission Control:
"We are in Stage
Separation"**



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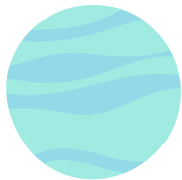
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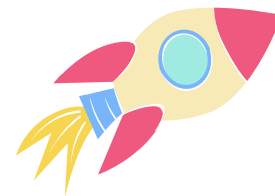
Reflection

❖ **Helping students reflect**

- ❖ The guiding question, "What did you do when you were not in the classroom?"
- ❖ Experiences show who they are, what matters to them, and how they demonstrate leadership
- ❖ Help them to transform their experience into words



Showcasing involvement



Quality vs Quantity

- ❖ UC campuses focus on depth and substance, not necessarily volume
- ❖ Consistency, commitment, leadership and growth are highly valued
- ❖ Consider school activities, at home responsibilities, and even faith-based involvement

Participation vs Impact

- ❖ The act of being present, involved in an activity (participation)
- ❖ The results, value, or lasting change created by the involvement (impact)
- ❖ Wording is very important, “I” statements help describe their specific role and involvement



Traditional vs non-traditional activities

- ❖ All activities are valued equally
- ❖ They do not have to be all “formal” or be sponsored by a school
- ❖ Leadership can range from school activities to hobbies



Example #1: Work experience

Activity	When did you work?	Hours per week
Landscaping	10th – 12th grade	➤ 10 hours per week ➤ 20 weeks per week (summer)
What were your job responsibilities?		

Assisted my father in promoting our services by distributing flyers door to door, helping mow lawns, providing quotes, and researching cost-effective supply strategies. I raked leaves, cut branches, and ensured safety protocols were consistently followed throughout our work practices.

Describe the company or organization you worked for

Family operated business that serves the city and surrounding communities for the past 10 years.



Example #2: Hobbies

Activity

Gym

When did you work?

9th – 12th grade

Hours per week

- 10 hours per week
- 48 weeks per year

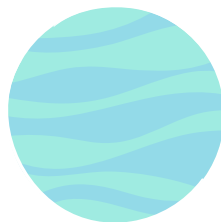
Description

Became the youngest certified personal trainer at my home gym after completing 90 hours of supervised training. Researched fitness and nutrition practices, organized peer training sessions on proper technique and injury prevention and promoted accessible wellness opportunities by developing summer workout resources for students without gym memberships.

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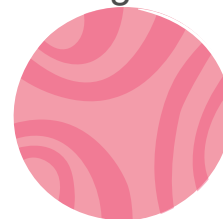
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Example #3: Extracurricular activities

Activity	When did you work?	Hours per week
E-Sports	9 th -12 th Grade	➤ 12 hours per week ➤ 48 weeks per year
Description		

- Played competitive video games
- Competed in national tournaments since 10th grade
- Competed in national-level e-sports tournaments, earning approximately \$400 in prize winnings
- Organized and managed competitive team tournaments, coordinating players, schedules, and match logistics
- Served as team leader, developing strategies and leading teammates to a regional championship title



Crafting effective descriptions

Mission Control:
"Now Orbiting"



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Why the description matters

Strong descriptions help admissions readers understand:

- ❖ How students spend their time
- ❖ How they contribute to their communities
- ❖ How they grow through their experiences
- ❖ What responsibilities/roles they take on

What we look for:

- ❖ Initiative
- ❖ Growth
- ❖ Commitment
- ❖ Impact
- ❖ Leadership



Effective descriptions

Encourage students to explain:

- ❖ What they learned from the experience
- ❖ What skills developed
- ❖ Areas of personal and professional growth

Questions to ask students

- ❖ What responsibility did you take on?
- ❖ What improvements or contributions did you make?
- ❖ What skills did you strengthen through this experience?

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Descriptions matter

Action + Impact + Growth

Strong descriptions should:

- ❖ Detail specific actions
- ❖ Include measurable outcomes
- ❖ Demonstrate leadership or ownership



Recognizing transferable skills

These skills develop from jobs, athletics, creative projects, volunteering, etc.

- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Teamwork
- ❖ Adaptability
- ❖ Problem-solving
- ❖ Time management

Avoiding vagueness/repetition

Encourage students to write:

- ❖ Clear, specific examples of actions taken
- ❖ Including concrete results to show impact
- ❖ Focus on what was done, and why it mattered
- ❖ Use of strong, active verbs to describe contributions

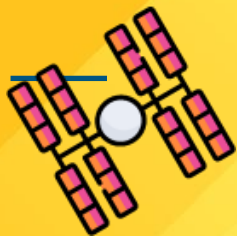


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Busting myths

**Mission Control:
"Begin Descent"**



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Common myths & misconceptions

① Certain activities hold more weight in the eyes of the reader

What adds value is the quality of the student's involvement (commitment, leadership, progression, etc.) rather than the involvement itself

② Readers only want to see school activities

We want to see it all! Involvement on the school, community, state, national and international level are encouraged



③ They don't read it anyway

This section allows the reader to get a holistic picture of the student, not just academics but their life outside the classroom

⑤ Must add one per "activity and award" category

Some students may not have anything to add for certain categories.

④ Students need to explain the activity itself

Although some readers are familiar, students should also focus on their own roles and responsibilities

Examples

Cleared for takeoff vs. mission abort

**Mission Control:
"Approaching
Reentry"**



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Mission abort vs. cleared for takeoff

Cleared for takeoff

- Specific
- Reflective
- Impact-focused
- Highlights growth or initiative

Mission abort

- Too vague
- Repetitive
- Lacks detail
- Only lists tasks completed

Category: Awards or Honors

"Out of 500 students in my junior class, I was selected as "Math Student of the Year" by the Math Department. I was chosen for demonstrating academic excellence, leadership in collaborative projects, and consistent peer mentorship in mathematics courses."

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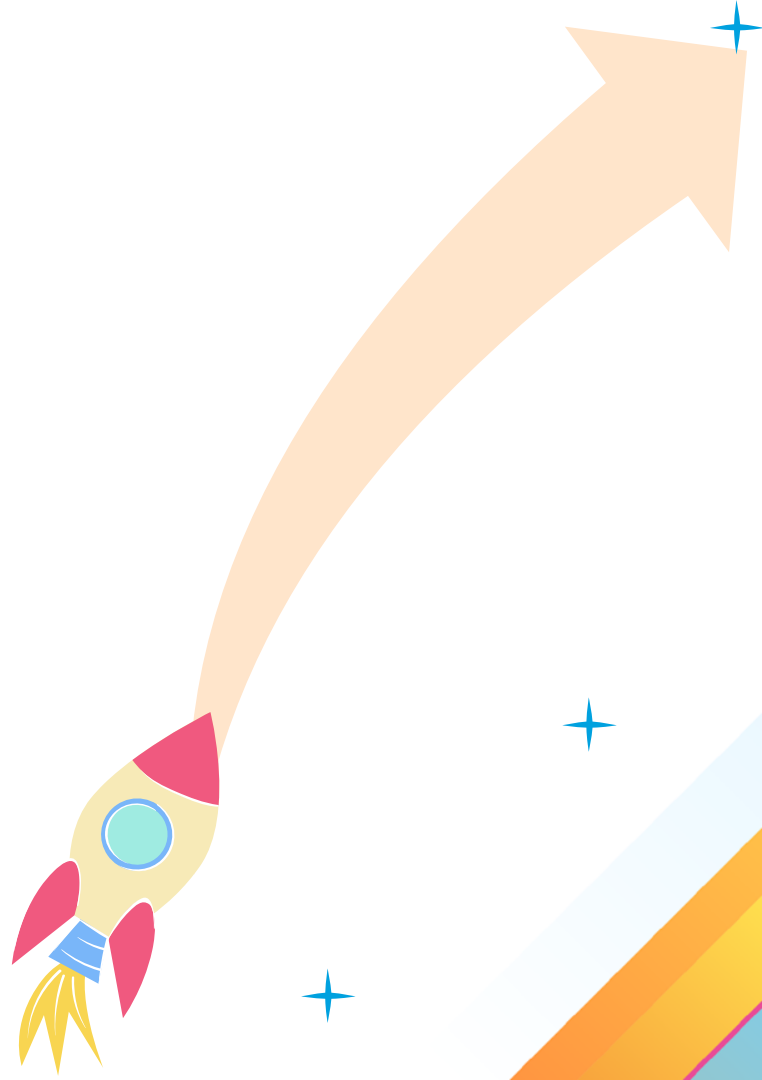
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Example 1: Mission abort vs. cleared for takeoff

CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

- Explains why the award was earned
- Shows leadership and peer impact
- Highlights growth, not just recognition
- Adds context beyond just the award title



Category: Education Preparation Programs

**"Participated in College
Readiness Program."**

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Example 2: Mission abort vs. cleared for takeoff

MISSION ABORT

- **Vague- no detail about what the program entailed**
- **“Participated” suggests passive involvement**
- **No skills gained or activities described**
- **Does not show engagement, learning, or initiative**

CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

- Completed 6-week college readiness program focused on public speaking, financial literacy, and leadership. Practiced presentations, explored college pathways, and collaborated with first-gen students on academic planning and goal setting.



"Completed introductory Python course; built a budgeting app with peers. Applied coding basics to real-world problem solving, debugging functions, and collaborating on design and testing."

Example 3: Mission abort vs. cleared for takeoff

CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

- **Shows application of learning, not just participation in class**
- **Includes project-based outcome**
- **Demonstrates collaboration + technical skills**
- **Connects coursework to real skill development**



“Worked at family owned restaurant, while balancing school work.”

Example 4: Mission abort vs. cleared for takeoff

MISSION ABORT

- **No detail about job duties or responsibilities**
- **No indication of skills gained**
- **Does not show time commitment or balancing responsibilities**
- **Could apply to any job at any level without distinction**

CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

- Supported my family's business while managing a rigorous courseload. Worked evening shifts during the school week and all day Saturday. Multitasked by managing orders, resolving customer concerns, and ran social media account to highlight daily specials and strengthen communication.



"Participated in club activities and discussions focused on environmental awareness and sustainability. Led school-wide projects and events. Gathered 1500 signatures to support installing compost bins in the cafeteria and student spaces."

Example 5: Mission abort vs. cleared for takeoff

CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

- **Shows application of learning, not just participation in class**
- **The use of action verbs to describe contribution made**
- **Mentions concrete examples of contributions**
- **Demonstrates personal growth and skill gained**

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“Sorted and distributed food to 100+ families weekly. Translated for Spanish speaking clients and ensured efficient packaging and distribution during peak service hours.”

Example 6: Mission abort vs. cleared for takeoff

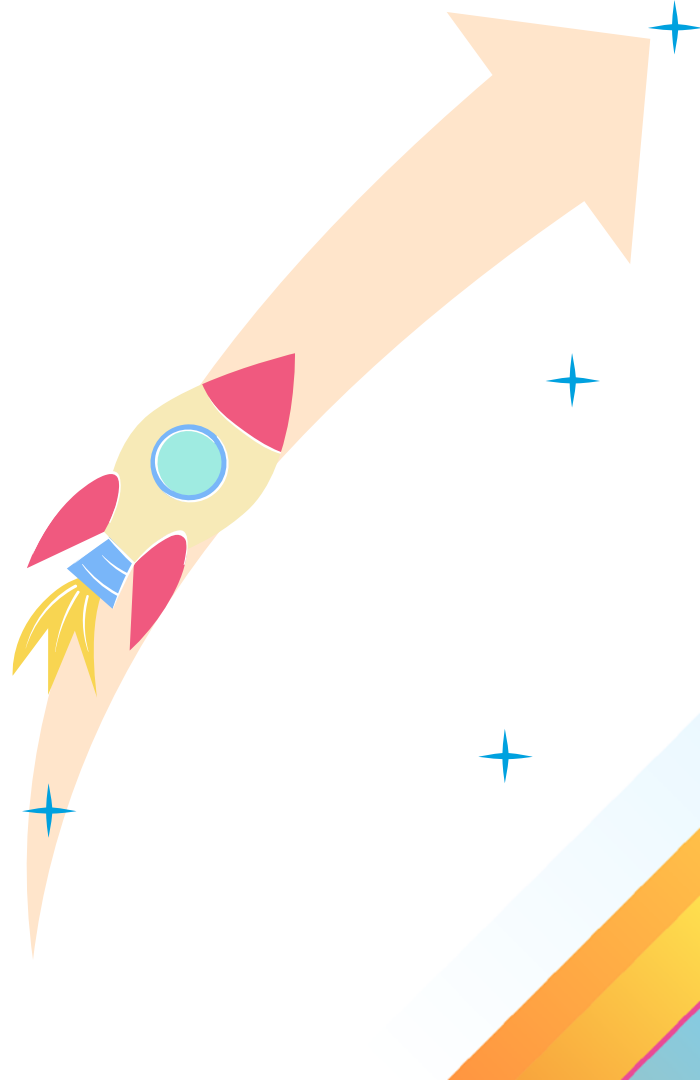
CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

- Includes measurable impact (100+ families served)
- Specifies responsibilities and task
- Shows communication and service skills
- Demonstrates consistent, meaningful contribution

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Counselor pro-tips

Mission Control:
"TOUCHDOWN!"



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Counselor tips

**Encourage students to
build their resumes early**

Quality over quantity

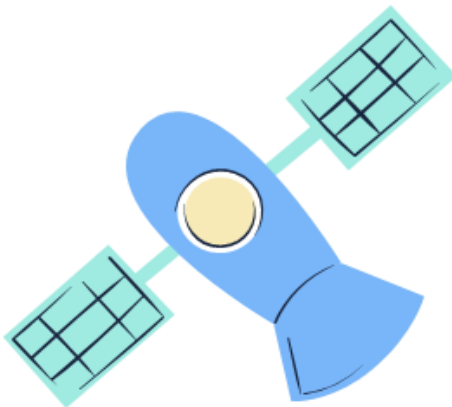
**Use the additional
comments section as
needed for clarification**

Avoid repetition

Honesty matters

Avoid using acronyms

**List leadership
positions and year(s)
position held**



Thank you



**Mission Control:
QUESTIONS?**