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How to increase your odds of getting selected to Y Combinator

Spoiler... start the name of your company with the letter S.

Of the 2,083 companies that have made the YC list from 2005 to 2020, 11.6% (242) of them had a name starting with the letter S. This is 8.9% greater than an evenly distributed 2.8% (1/36 characters A-Z, 0-9). This compares to 4.6% of the names in the S&P 500 that start with the letter S. There were 4.2 times more companies that start with an S than an evenly distributed list. The letter S was top of its class in 21 of the 32 YC batches. (Interestingly, during the summer 2009 and winter 2010 sessions, there were no companies starting with an S; a rare repeat drought in an otherwise active streak). The next most popular letter, C, has 161 companies, 81 less than S.

Distribution of Y Combinator Selections by First Letter of Startup Name
2005 - 2020

Starts with	#	% Total	% Exited	% Dead	W20	S19	W19	S18	W18	S17	W17	S16	F2	F1	W16	S15	W15	S14	W14	S13	W13	S12	W12	S11	W11	S10	W10	S09	W09	S08	W08	S07	W07	S06	W06	S05			
S	242	11.6%	35%	65%	11%	7%	11%	11%	13%	12%	14%	17%	24%	18%	12%	12%	14%	8%	11%	13%	19%	12%	13%	16%	2%	6%	0%	0%	6%	22%	5%	21%	8%	20%	14%	13%			
C	161	7.7%	45%	55%	5%	6%	9%	9%	7%	8%	7%	4%	12%	18%	7%	9%	5%	9%	9%	8%	8%	9%	8%	14%	6%	15%	4%	6%	9%	5%	11%								
P	146	7.0%	19%	81%	5%	7%	7%	7%	9%	10%	6%	4%	8%	9%	9%	4%	10%	8%	5%	4%	11%	5%	11%	10%	2%	3%	4%	19%	26%										
T	134	6.4%	22%	78%	10%	8%	5%	5%	6%	3%	7%	3%	4%		5%	9%	8%	8%	13%	4%	5%	5%	4%	4%	11%	12%	4%	4%	6%	4%	5%	5%	8%	20%					
M	130	6.2%	23%	77%	5%	8%	6%	5%	7%	7%	6%	8%	8%		10%	4%	5%	2%	7%	2%	8%	5%	11%	10%	11%	3%	7%	9%	4%	15%									
A	121	5.8%	50%	50%	6%	5%	8%	8%	7%	4%	8%	7%	4%	9%	4%	3%	3%	2%	11%	6%	3%	5%	4%	4%	4%	5%	9%	4%	13%	9%	16%	8%							
B	102	4.9%	33%	67%	5%	6%	5%	5%	5%	2%	9%	2%	8%		3%	7%	7%	13%	5%	4%	8%	4%	4%	2%	7%	3%	4%	4%											
L	87	4.2%	55%	45%	4%	7%	3%	3%	5%	5%	4%	5%		5%	5%	4%	5%	2%	9%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	2%	3%	4%	13%											
G	86	4.1%	42%	58%	5%	5%	3%	3%	3%	7%		2%	4%		6%	9%	6%	6%	4%	6%	3%	3%	4%	4%	7%	9%	4%	4%											
D	83	4.0%	64%	36%	6%	5%	5%	5%	3%	5%	3%	2%		5%	4%	1%	6%	2%						4%	5%	2%	4%	2%	3%	4%	9%	6%		5%	16%				
F	82	3.9%	38%	63%	5%	5%	2%	5%	1%	6%	4%	3%		9%	3%	3%	1%	6%	2%	4%	5%	5%	9%	4%	5%	6%	4%	9%	6%	4%	5%	5%							
R	81	3.9%	64%	36%	3%	4%	3%	5%	3%	4%	6%	5%	4%	5%	4%	3%	5%	6%	4%	6%			5%		6%		6%	9%	6%	4%	5%	5%							
H	79	3.8%	43%	57%	6%	4%	3%	5%	4%	6%	3%	2%	4%	5%	3%	4%	1%	4%	2%	4%	3%	7%	4%	2%	9%	3%	4%	4%	6%	5%									
V	68	3.3%	33%	67%	2%	5%	3%	1%	5%	3%	7%	4%		5%	2%	5%	4%	4%	2%			7%		6%					6%	4%									
E	65	3.1%	43%	57%	5%	5%	4%	2%	3%	3%	4%			5%	3%	2%	2%		2%		4%	5%	4%	7%	2%	2%	3%	11%											
O	63	3.0%	33%	67%	3%	1%	2%	6%	7%	2%	1%	4%	4%		3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%				2%	2%	6%	7%	4%											
N	60	2.9%	0%	100%	3%	2%	3%	2%	5%	2%	4%	4%		5%	3%	2%	3%	6%	4%				1%			5%			6%										
W	56	2.7%	38%	63%	2%	3%	4%		1%	2%	4%	4%			2%	2%	2%	2%	4%	6%	8%				2%	6%		9%	6%										
I	54	2.6%	27%	73%		1%	3%	5%	1%	1%	3%	3%	8%		4%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%			3%	2%	4%	2%	6%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%							
Z	42	2.0%	57%	43%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%				2%	2%	1%	6%	7%		5%	1%	4%	4%	2%		7%												
K	42	2.0%	25%	75%	1%	2%	3%	4%	1%	1%	3%				3%	1%	3%		2%	2%	3%	5%	2%	2%	2%	3%													
U	24	1.2%	33%	67%	1%		2%	1%	1%	2%	2%				3%		1%	4%	2%	2%																			
J	22	1.1%	20%	80%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%		2%		5%		1%								2%															
Y	17	0.8%	20%	80%	2%	1%	1%		1%		2%				1%		1%							2%	2%	2%													
Q	12	0.6%		100%			1%			2%	1%		4%		2%								1%		2%														
X	6	0.3%		100%							1%																												
1	4	0.2%		50%			1%				1%						2%																						
9	3	0.1%		100%			1%																1%	2%															
2	2	0.1%		100%				1%																															
8	2	0.1%	0%	100%																																			
7	2	0.1%		100%																																			
4	2	0.1%		100%																																			
2	2	0.1%		100%																																			
2	2	0.1%		100%																																			
â	1	0.0%		100%																																			

But what about success? The letter S is not as useful after your time at Y Combinator. Of the 23 companies starting with an S and listed with a "status" (dead or exited), only 35% (8) have exited (being acquired or some other positive outcome) with 65% listed as dead. The most successful starting letters (of those with over 16 companies on the list) are R, D and Z! with 64%, 64% and 57% having an "exited" status respectively.

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Ironically, Y Combinator is lucky they didn't go through their own program. Of the companies starting with the letter Y and having a status, only 20% had a chance of "exiting" with the remaining 80% dying out.

0 to 1 Analytics looks to buck the trend and be the first company to join the list with a company name starting with a 0.

Source: yclist.com, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_S%26P_500_companies, ycdb.co