What is Common App?

Common App is a non-profit college access organization that helps students apply to college every year. Common App's free college application tool is designed to make applying to college faster and easier. With Common App you only need to use one system to apply to multiple colleges and universities. There are two main parts you fill out: a set of common questions and each college's own specific questions. The best part is you only have to fill out the common questions one time!

Common App is a place for you to learn about the college admissions process, understand how to plan and apply to college, and discover all that different colleges have to offer. It's a hub of information that can guide you through each step of the application journey. It's a resource that connects you with financial aid and scholarship opportunities.

Whatever questions you might have, we're here to help

Application guides to give you step-by-step instructions on completing your application.

A **college roadmap** designed to guide you toward your next destination — no matter where you start.

An **application dictionary** to help you understand the terminology related to college applications.

A **library of FAQs** to answer any question you may have, and a support team that's available **24/7/365**.
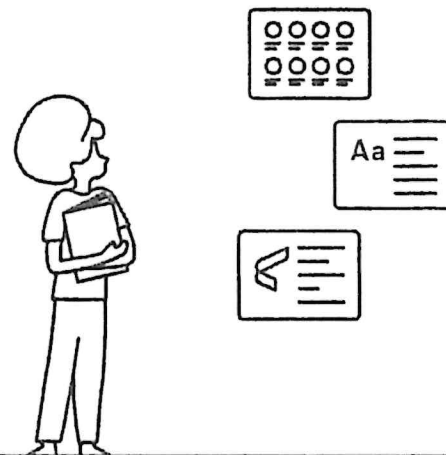
What's next

Visit commonapp.org to create your Common App account and start exploring colleges.

Common App at a glance

- More than 1,000 colleges and universities use Common App
- 250+ public colleges and universities
- 50+ international universities in 15+ countries
- 125+ MSIs
- 500+ without app fee
- 300+ test optional/flexible

common app
READY

How the first-year Common App works

A quickstart guide for students using the first-year Common App.

1 Add colleges

Get started by adding colleges to your list. You can find colleges to apply to in the College Search tab of your Common App account. The College Search tab also has information and links to help you research each college. More than 1,000 colleges use Common App! Go to commonapp.org/explore to start exploring.

2 Stay organized

Each college has its own set of specific requirements and supplements. When it comes to tracking this information and staying organized, we're here to help! Use the "Requirements Grid" and each college's "College Information" page to find this information.

To start your college application checklist, check out our "My College Requirements" worksheet at commonapp.org/ready.

3 Complete and submit

Answering all the questions in the Common App tab is a great way to start your applications. For each college you will:
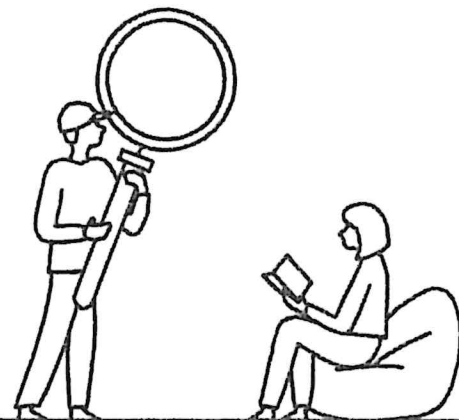
- Answer college specific questions
- Invite and manage recommenders
- Complete other supplements (if applicable)

After all these sections are complete, you are ready to submit your application! Submission is simple: review, pay (if applicable), and submit.

How does my application get there?

When you submit we combine your responses from the Common App and college specific questions, as well as any supplements, into one form. Your counselor, teachers, and other recommenders complete their reports and evaluations separately.

As recommenders submit their forms, they will be sent to the college to be added to your application.

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Application dictionary

Transfer
Academic recommendation
A recommendation submitted by a college academic advisor, professor, dean or instructor who oversees your college academic progress.

Admission plan
An admission plan is the schedule and method by which colleges and universities accept and review applications, and notify applicants of their decisions. Examples of admissions plans include early action, early decision, and regular decision.

Transfer
Adult student
An adult learner (also known as a returning student, adult student, or returning adult) is typically 25 years of age or older, and has delayed their post-secondary education for reasons such as family obligations, work responsibilities, and military service.

First-year
Advisor
A recommender role that lets you share your in-progress application with a trusted individual. Advisors can keep track of your progress, though they don't submit any forms on your behalf.

Application fee
The fee a college charges you to apply to their institution. The amount varies from 1 college to the next. See Fee Waivers.

Transfer
Articulation agreement
Colleges can use articulation agreements to help students with transferring credits. The agreement clarifies which courses will or won't transfer toward their intended major. The goal is to help students graduate on time and reduce the loss of academic credits.

CBO (Community Based Organization)
A not-for-profit college access organization that offers free advising for students.

CEEB code
A unique identification number assigned to high schools and colleges by the College Board. Some international schools may not have an assigned CEEB code.

Citizenship

Your status as a person recognized under the custom or law as being a member of a state or country. Depending on your citizenship status you may be asked to provide additional information.

Coed

Used to describe a college that offers the integrated education of male and female students in the same environment. You can filter by coed colleges in the College Search tab.

Transfer

College report

Collects information about your standing at your current institution. You may need to gather this information from more than 1 official at your institution, such as the advisor, dean, or registrar.

College specific questions

Questions that colleges ask in addition to the information collected in the Common App tab of the application. This includes the start term and admission plan you'd like to apply for.

Common App

The name of our online system used by students to apply to member colleges and universities across the country and around the world.

The name of the non-profit membership organization.

Common App ID (CAID)

A unique 8 digit numeric identifier that colleges use to match your materials with your application. You can find your unique CAID in the top right corner of your account.

Community college

A 2-year post-secondary institution that offers associates degrees. Students that have received their high school diploma or earned a GED can enroll in a community college. Students who earn their associates degree at a community college can transfer to a 4-year college or university to earn their bachelor's degree.

First-year

Counselor

An individual who provides academic, career, and college readiness to all K—12 students through a school counseling program. The counselor is also responsible for submitting your transcripts to colleges.

First-year

Counselor recommendation

A broad-based assessment written by your counselor to address things like your academic, extracurricular, and personal characteristics.

CSS Profile

The CSS Profile is required by many private colleges and universities to determine your

eligibility for non-government financial aid, which includes grants, loans, and scholarships from a college. Be sure to visit The College Board website for more information.

Deadline
The date by which you must submit your application materials. All deadlines are in your local time zone.

Early action (EA)
An application process to apply and receive a decision earlier than the regular decision notification date. Unlike early decision (ED), EA is "non-binding" and you have no obligation to enroll and will have until May 1 to consider the offer and confirm your enrollment.

Early decision (ED)
A "binding" application process by which you commit to enrolling in a certain college if you're admitted. You can apply to other colleges, but only apply ED to 1 college. If admitted, you must withdraw your other applications.

Essay
The "personal essay" or "personal statement" within the Common App gives you the chance to tell your story and to show off your writing skills. Not every college requires the essay and you can filter by this requirement in the College Search tab.

Evaluation
A writing prompt that your teachers and non-academic recommenders can use to elaborate on what they think colleges should know about you.

FAFSA
The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is used to determine your eligibility for federal, state, and college-sponsored financial aid. This includes grants, educational loans, and work-study programs. Be sure to visit the FAFSA website for more information.

Fee waivers
A request to the college to remove the application fee. Using either the Common App fee waiver, which your counselor must confirm, or a college-specific fee waiver, you will not be required to pay the fee to submit your application.

FERPA
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act is a federal law that protects your education records. To learn more, visit the U.S. Department of Education.

First-year

Final report
A form submitted by your high school counselor that typically summarizes your academic performance from freshman year to the end of your senior year of high school. The final report is the last form your counselor will submit.

Financial aid
Funding in the form of grants and loans to help you pay for education-related expenses

including tuition, room and board, textbooks, and supplies for college.

First-year
You are a first-year applicant if you will be completing high school this academic year or if you have never enrolled at a college or university. Please check with the colleges you applied to see which application type is best for you.

Gap year
A break you take in your formal education, typically between graduating from high school and starting college.

Transfer

Guaranteed admission
Guaranteed admission agreements between colleges can help students transfer with confidence. If a student meets specific academic requirements, they can apply to transfer and the partnering college will automatically accept their application. Guaranteed admission is also sometimes referred to as transfer admission guarantee (TAG), automatic admission, or guaranteed transfer.

GPA (grade point average)
The academic performance measurement calculated based on your grades. Many high schools calculate GPA differently. While you can self-report this information, your counselor will submit official transcripts as part of their forms.

High school
The name used in the United States for a secondary school with students between grades 9-12.

Transfer

High school official recommendation
A recommendation submitted by a high school counselor or school official which also includes a copy of the final high school transcript.

International applicant
Any applicant who is not a US resident is considered an international applicant by the Common App. Colleges might require different information from their international applicants, so be sure to check their website for more information.

Matriculation
The formal process of entering a college or of becoming eligible to enter college by completing certain academic requirements.

Transfer

Mid-term report
Collects information about courses in which you are currently enrolled. Please print the form and follow the instructions provided before mailing to each of your colleges.

First-year

Mid-year report
Submitted by your counselor, this form usually summarizes your academic performance through the middle of your final year of high school.

First-year

Optional report

A "just in case" form that your counselor can submit if they want or need to.

First-year

Other recommender

A type of recommender that lets you invite coaches, employers, etc. to support your application for admission. Be sure to check the college's Other Recommender requirements.

Transfer

Personal recommendation

A recommendation submitted by someone who can speak to your character and abilities.

Portfolio

A supplemental form used to showcase your special talents in 1 or more subjects. Certain colleges will require a portfolio to complete your application.

Transfer

Prerequisites

A course or program that needs to be completed before you are able to apply to a program.

Transfer

Professional recommendation

A recommendation submitted by an individual you know from a professional experience, like a job or internship.

Transfer

Program

A listing of academic areas or majors that share the same admissions requirements. One college can offer multiple programs in the Common App for transfer.

Recommenders

Individuals you invite to complete assessments to support your application for admission. There are several different types of recommenders you can invite through the Common App. Remember to check each college's recommendation requirements, since they vary from college to college.

Regular decision (RD)

An application process in which you apply by a specific date and then receive an admission decision within a stated period of time.

Restrictive early action (REA)

Similar to early action, applying for REA requires that you submit your application earlier than regular decision (RD). As a result, you will receive your admission decision earlier than you would receive a RD decision. Additionally colleges place certain restrictions on your applications to other early application processes.

Rolling admission

A decision plan that lets students submit an application at any time throughout the year. Colleges will review applications as they receive them, and make admission decisions throughout the year.

School report

A form submitted by your high school counselor to provide basic information about your academic performance.

Standardized tests

Any form of test that either requires all test takers to answer the same questions in the same way, and that is scored in a "standard" or consistent manner. This makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students. Many colleges require you to take and report the results from certain standardized tests.

Teacher

A type of recommender that has taught you in a specific subject and can speak to your performance in their class.

Transcript

Documentation to prove which courses you've taken and the grades you received for those courses. Your counselor will be required to provide an official transcript on your behalf.
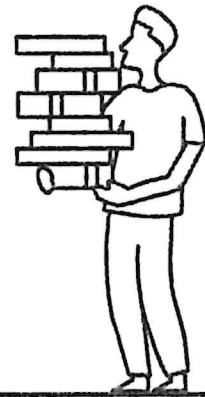
Transfer

A transfer student is anyone seeking to continue their college education. Common App for transfer supports a wide range of applicants including community college students, 4-year to 4-year transfers, new and returning adult learners, and veterans and active military members.

Writing supplement

Not required by every college, these are additional writing prompts asked as part of the college specific questions. The Writing Supplement can only be submitted once your application to that college has been submitted.

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Gather your materials
Use this checklist to help you gather the information you'll need as you fill out your Common App.

☐ **High school information**
You'll need to know things like your high school's CEEB code, GPA scale, and class rank reporting. Check in with your counselor for more details about this information. Ask them for the High School Details information sheet! (Download it at commonapp.org/ready)

☐ **An unofficial copy of your high school transcript**
You'll be asked to list the courses you're taking this academic year.

Some colleges ask applicants to self report their full academic record in the Courses & Grades section. If you have a college on your list that requires Courses & Grades, you'll need your transcript to complete this section.

☐ **A copy of your test scores and dates**
You have the option to enter scores for standardized exams like the ACT and SAT that you have taken and/or plan to take. Don't forget, you'll still need to send official score reports to colleges that require them.

☐ **Citizenship information**
Social Security Number, if you intend to apply for financial aid via FAFSA (For U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, U.S. dual citizens, U.S. permanent residents, U.S. refugees, and U.S. asylees).

For Permanent Residents: A copy of your green card.

For non-U.S. citizens: U.S. visa type, number, and date issued. If you do not yet have a U.S. visa but intend to apply for one, you can indicate that in the application.

☐ **State of residence information**
If you think you qualify for in-state tuition for a school you might be asked to share more information about your residence in that state.

☐ **Parent information**
You'll be asked to share some basic information about one or more parents, including your parent's occupation and job title, and the education level they received. If your parent attended college, you'll need to know the name and location of the college they attended, as well as what degree they received and when.

Parent information

- Occupation
- Job title
- Education level
- Name of college(s) attended
- College location
- Degree earned
- Year degree earned

☐ **A list of academic honors**
You can include up to 5 academic honors you received during high school. You'll need to include the honor's title, when you received it, and the level of recognition you received (regional or national, for example).

☐ **A list of your activities**
You have the option to enter up to 10 activities you participated in during high school. These activities might include family responsibilities, jobs, volunteer work, clubs, sports, hobbies, and more.

For each activity you'll list: the years of participation, hours per week and weeks per year spent on the activity, position/leadership held, and a brief description.

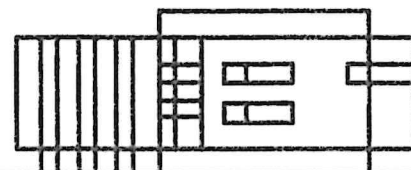· ·

Use this space to jot down a few activities you want to report in your application.

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READY

My college requirements worksheet

Staying organized and understanding what you need to fill out in the application is crucial. But, because each college has its own specific requirements, it can seem like a lot to keep track of.

Use this worksheet to collect the requirements of the colleges on your list. This way you have all the information in one place when you need it. We've included space for 4 colleges, but if you have more you want to add, just copy and paste the last page!

Here is where you can find colleges' requirements in the application:

College Search tab
Select a college from the list to open their requirements. You can also use the "more info" icon for links to other helpful resources.

My Colleges tab
Each college's "College Information" page contains all their specific requirements.

Requirements Grid
This PDF lists all colleges that use Common App and their requirements. You can access this document on your Dashboard, in College Search, or in the Solutions Center.

Writing Requirements by college
This FAQ lists out all the Common App colleges and their writing questions. You can find it in our Solutions Center at appsupport.commonapp.org

College name:

_____

Deadline: _____

Application Fee: _____

Personal Essay:
- ☐ Yes

- ☐ Optional

Courses & Grades:
- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No

Supplements:
- ☐ Portfolio

- ☐ Writing Supplement

Testing Policy:
- ☐ SAT/ACT Tests Used

- ☐ Always Required

- ☐ Sometimes Required

- ☐ Never Required

- ☐ Flexible

- ☐ Ignored

Writing Questions:
- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No

- ☐ Additional Information

Recommendations:
Teacher Evaluations:

___ Required   ___ Optional

Other Evaluations:

___ Required   ___ Optional

Types Accepted:
- ☐ Arts Teacher

- ☐ Clergy

- ☐ Coach

- ☐ College Access Counselor

- ☐ Employer

- ☐ Family Member

- ☐ Peer

- ☐ Other

College name:

_____

Deadline: _____

Application Fee: _____

Personal Essay:
☐ Yes

☐ Optional

Courses & Grades:
☐ Yes

☐ No

Supplements:
☐ Portfolio

☐ Writing Supplement

Testing Policy:
☐ SAT/ACT Tests Used

☐ Always Required

☐ Sometimes Required

☐ Never Required

☐ Flexible

☐ Ignored

Writing Questions:
☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Additional Information

Recommendations:
Teacher Evaluations:

___ Required   ___ Optional

Other Evaluations:

___ Required   ___ Optional
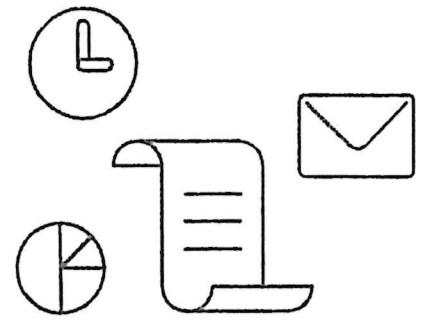
Types Accepted:
☐ Arts Teacher

☐ Clergy

☐ Coach

☐ College Access Counselor

☐ Employer

☐ Family Member

☐ Peer

☐ Other

College name:

_____

Deadline: _____

Application Fee: _____

Personal Essay:
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] Optional

Courses & Grades:
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Supplements:
- [ ] Portfolio
- [ ] Writing Supplement

Testing Policy:
- [ ] SAT/ACT Tests Used
- [ ] Always Required
- [ ] Sometimes Required
- [ ] Never Required
- [ ] Flexible
- [ ] Ignored

Writing Questions:
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Additional Information

Recommendations:
Teacher Evaluations:

___ Required   ___ Optional

Other Evaluations:

___ Required   ___ Optional

Types Accepted:
- [ ] Arts Teacher
- [ ] Clergy
- [ ] Coach
- [ ] College Access Counselor
- [ ] Employer
- [ ] Family Member
- [ ] Peer
- [ ] Other

common app
READY

High school details information sheet

How to use this resource

In the Common App all students need to answer several questions about their high school and counselor. However, not all students know this information or where to find it. This sheet will help you collect and easily share these details with your students.

All you need to do is fill out the information in the fields that follow and distribute the sheet to your students.

FAQs

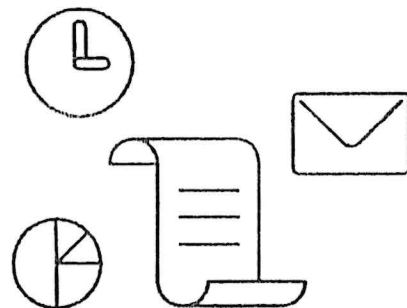**How do students report GPA scale in the application?**
The GPA scale appears as a drop down menu in the application, with options of 4 through 20 and 100. If your school doesn't calculate a cumulative numerical GPA, or if it uses a GPA scale that is different than the options available, select "N/A". This information is not required in the application.

My school calculates both weighted and unweighted GPA. Which should students select?
In this case, students should report the weighted value.

Who can I contact if I have questions?
For more information, visit our Solutions Center at recsupport.commonapp.org or email us at **sfsupport@commonapp.net**.

My high school details

Use the information below to help you complete
the Education section in the Common App.

High school information

High school name: Edsel Ford High School

High school address: 20601 Rotunda Dr. Dearborn, MI. 48124

CEEB code: 230770

Graduation date: June 7, 2024

Counselor information

Counselor name: _____

Counselor job title: _____

Counselor email: _____

Counselor phone: _____

Grades and current courses

Graduating class size (approx.): 365

GPA scale: 4.0
(4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 100, None)

Class rank reporting: ☒ Exact ☐ Decile ☐ Quintile
☐ Quartile ☐ None

GPA weighting: ☐ Weighted ☐ Unweighted
If taking AP or College → weighted

Class rank weighting: ☒ Weighted ☐ Unweighted

Course scheduling system: ☒ Semester ☐ Trimester
☐ Quarter

FERPA & your application

When it comes time to invite your counselor and recommenders, Common App will prompt you to complete the FERPA Release Authorization. FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) is a law that protects the privacy of your education records.

Completing the FERPA Release Authorization will grant your high school permission to send those records on your behalf. Here's a quick breakdown of how this process works in the Common App:

The release authorization asks you two questions about your education records under FERPA.

First, you must grant your high school(s) permission to release all requested records. Colleges you apply to may require documents like transcripts or letters of recommendation. Granting your high school(s) this permission allows colleges to receive these records and contact your school with questions.

What is an education record?
Education records are documents related to your attendance and performance in school.

For example: grades, transcripts, test scores, school discipline, etc.

Second, you will be asked to waive or not to waive your right to review recommendations and other forms.

Waiving your rights lets colleges know that you don't plan to read your recommendations. This helps reassure colleges that the letters are candid and truthful. Some recommenders may only write a letter if you have waived your rights. Check with your counselor or teachers to see if any of them follow such a policy.

Learn more
Talk to your counselor, another school official, or your parent/legal guardian. You can also visit the U.S. Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office at: studentprivacy.ed.gov.

Understanding the Testing section in Common App

The Testing section lets you self-report scores of any standardized tests you've taken. Standardized tests are any form of test that requires all test takers to answer the same questions in the same way, and that is scored in a "standard" or consistent manner.

Each college and university can choose their own testing policy. If you're deciding which tests to take (or which to report), double check the policies of the colleges you're applying to. College's testing requirements are listed on their College Information page. The Requirements Grid also shows you each college's and testing requirements.

College testing policies

Always required:
Standardized test scores are always a required part of the application.

Sometimes required:
Standardized test scores are sometimes required as part of the application. Check a college's College Information page for specific details.

Never required:
Standardized test scores are never a required part of the application.

Flexible:
This means alternatives to standardized test scores (like a graded paper) may be accepted. Colleges with this policy may also accept different types of tests, like AP tests. Be sure you check the college's website for more information.

Standardized tests you can report in Common App

College admission tests:
- ACT
- SAT

Subject tests:
- SAT Subject Tests
- AP Subject Tests
- IB Subject Tests
- Cambridge Tests

English proficiency tests:
- TOEFL
- PTE Academic
- IELTS
- Duolingo English Test

Ignored:
Standardized test scores are ignored if they are received.

If you do plan to report standardized test scores, keep in mind these scores are self-reported and not official. Official test scores will still need to be sent to colleges through the testing agency.

As you begin filling out your Common App, remember that you have some flexibility in the Testing section. You can choose how to complete this section and which colleges receive your test scores. This is especially useful if you are applying to colleges with different testing policies.

Did you know?

You can search for colleges based on their testing requirements.

To remove test scores all you need to do is go to the Tests Taken section and remove the test(s) you selected. If you don't plan on submitting any scores to a college, answer that "No" you do not want to self-report scores. That will complete the section and remove any information you had previously entered from any future submissions.

Don't worry! The information you entered won't completely disappear. To add your previously entered test scores, answer "Yes", you would like to report scores. Then, add back the test you had listed before. The sections will reappear, along with your answers.

For more information about filling out the Testing section, visit our help resources at commonapp.org/help.

common app
READY

Approaching the Activities section

The Activities section is one of the seven sections of the Common App tab. In it you have the chance to tell colleges more about who you are outside the classroom. You can use this section to highlight the activities that have been the most meaningful to you throughout high school.

Take a moment to reflect on what types of activities you may want to include. Did you have family responsibilities, a job, internship, or volunteer work? What about hobbies or sports?

Use this space to jot down an activity or two you might want to share.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

The Activities section is one of our team's favorite sections of the application. Activities add persona to an application; they demonstrate an applicant's interests outside of the classroom and allow us a glimpse into that applicant's passions, further demonstrating how that individual may enhance our student community.

—Adelphi University (Garden City, NY)

You can add up to ten activities to your application, but that doesn't mean that you need to enter ten. On average, students applying through Common App report 6 activities.

Don't forget, this section is how colleges can get to know more about you. It can show what makes you unique: your pursuits, interests, and passions. Focus on what activities can best tell that story and not on the number you're reporting.

How it works

First, you'll select your activity type. If your activity type isn't listed, you can choose "other club/activity" from the dropdown menu. You can give more details in the position/leadership and activity description fields.

Next, you'll briefly describe the activity and your position. You have limited space in these fields, so you may need to abbreviate words and simplify your grammar.

Characters allowed:

- 50 characters – Position/Leadership description
- 100 characters – Organization name
- 150 characters – Activity details, honors won, and accomplishments

Example activity descriptions

Original
For two years I volunteered at my local animal shelter. I helped out where needed, but mainly walked dogs and monitored the front desk. Last year I was asked to take on more responsibility and have been volunteering as the receptionist during the weekends. (256 characters)

Edited
Volunteer at local animal shelter walking dogs and running front desk. Given more responsibility last year and now volunteer as receptionist. (141 characters)

The edited version fits the character limit and still gives the important details. The time spent on the activity has been taken out, because that information is reported elsewhere in the section.

For each activity you'll provide the hours spent per week on the activity, and then the weeks spent per year. If you can't remember the exact details, like the time spent on an activity, it's alright to give your best guess.

For more information, visit our Solution Center at appsupport.commonapp.org

Telling your story

How to approach the essay

The Common App essay instructions ask you what you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores. You have 7 prompts but endless possibilities to tell your story. Here are some ideas to inspire your thinking.

Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, please share your story.

Think about

- Your community, environment, family, and culture
- What you're deeply curious about and how you spend your time
- What makes you proud
- People and experiences that have shaped your life

Ask yourself

- What's missing from the rest of my application?
- Is there context to help colleges understand who I am?

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Think about

- All obstacles: big, small, personal, and societal
- Hardships faced by family or friends that also impacted you
- Unresolved challenges you're still struggling with

Ask yourself

- How did I cope? How did I grow?
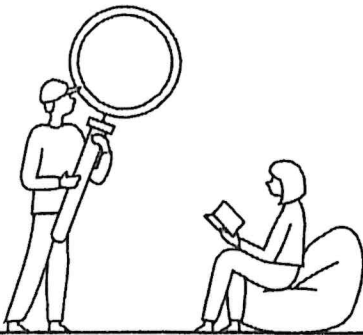- Who helped me?

Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

Think about

- Anywhere you spend time: school, clubs, work, home, place of worship
- Everyone you interact with: friends, teammates, family, teachers, coaches

Ask yourself

- Did the experience clarify or change my values?
- What was the impact on my relationships?
- Did I surprise myself—or anyone else?

Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

Think about

- All types of interaction: Compliments, criticism, gifts, advice, support
- People who know you well and people who don't

Ask yourself

- What made the interaction surprising?
- How did I feel?
- How did I react?

Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Think about

- The full range of your achievements, both public and private
- Small or everyday experiences that had a powerful impact on you
- Times when you were surprised by what you learned or discovered

Ask yourself

- How did I change?
- How can I continue to grow?
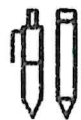- How can I share what I learned with others?

Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

Think about

- How you choose to spend your free time
- Your hobbies, your classes
- What you read, what you write, what you create

Ask yourself

- How did my curiosity start?
- What does this interest tell others about me?
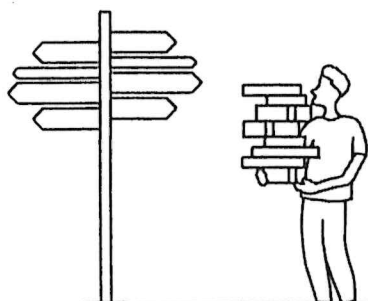- What does this interest tell me about myself?

Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Think about

- What you want to share, not what you think colleges want to hear
- Topics that reveal who you are and what matters to you

Ask yourself

- Does this essay provide new information to my colleges?
- Is there anything left unsaid in my application?

Thank you to former high school college advisor Alice Kleeman and the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Making Caring Common Project for their inspiration and contributions to this resource.

Understanding the recommendation process

Many colleges ask you to include letters of recommendation with your application. These letters are submitted by recommenders. A recommender's input helps clarify and support the information you share in your application. They also help inform colleges about your academic potential and how you would fit in with their community.

Who are recommenders?

Recommenders are people who have worked with and supported you in your life. They can be individuals in your school – like counselors and teachers. They can also be people who worked with you in extracurricular activities, such as coaches or employers.

There are four recommender types in the Common App: counselors, teachers, other recommenders, and advisors.

Counselor
Counselors share information about you within the context of your entire class and school community. They submit several different forms, including your transcript. The counselor recommendation letter provides insights into your academic history. They can also share information about achievements, extracurricular accomplishments, and personal interests.

Teacher
Teachers provide information about you in the context of their classroom. They have firsthand knowledge of your intellectual curiosity, creative thought, and writing quality. They can also contextualize your class behavior and work habits.

Other Recommender
Other recommenders are individuals you have worked with outside of school. They can provide context around your hobbies, passions, and other responsibilities. The other recommender types available in the Common App are: Arts Teacher, Clergy, Coach, College Access Counselor, Employer, Family Member, Peer, or Other.

Did you know?
Each college can choose which types of other recommenders they accept.

Advisor

An advisor can be anyone who is assisting you with your application process. One thing that makes the advisor role different, is that they do not submit any forms on your behalf. Advisors can track your application progress and see PDF preview of your application, if you choose to share it.

Recommendation requirements

Every college can choose how many letters of recommendation to require. They can also determine which recommender types they accept. To see a college's requirements, go to their "College Information" screen in the My Colleges tab.

Asking for a letter of recommendation

Before inviting a recommender in your application, it's important to ask if they are willing to provide a recommendation first. It's best to ask in person, but an email is ok too. When asking, be respectful of your recommenders' time. You should ask for a letter of recommendation at least three weeks in advance of a deadline. The more advance notice you give, the more time they have to craft a well-written letter.
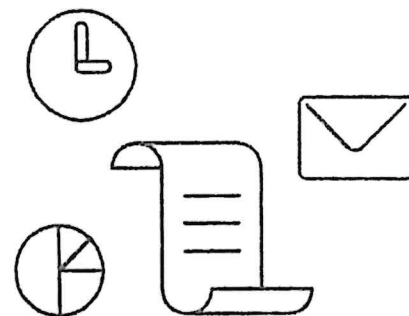
When you are ready to send your invitations, go to the My Colleges tab. You can invite recommenders in any college's Recommenders and FERPA section. For more details about this process, check out the application guide on commonapp.org.

Supporting your recommenders

Counselors and teachers are asked to write letters of recommendation by many students. To help make the process easier for them, we created a set of questionnaires for you to fill out. The information you share will help them write a more personal and effective recommendation.

It's also a good idea to stay in contact with your recommenders. Help keep them updated on your application deadlines and other important information. You can also track the status of your recommendations within your application.

Don't forget to thank your recommenders for writing those letters! A thank you note goes a long way.

Understanding application fees & fee waivers

Application fees

An application fee is a fee that a college charges for applying to their institution. Each college can choose how much to charge, and whether or not they charge a fee at all. In fact, many colleges don't charge a fee.

There are several places within Common App that list colleges' application fee requirements:

College Search
When you choose a school from the results list you'll see a breakdown of all their requirements, including application fees.

Did you know?
In College Search you can choose to search for colleges that charge no application fee at all.

College Information
The first page of any college on your My Colleges tab shows their "College Information". Application fees for both domestic and international applicants are listed on this page.

Requirements Grid
The Requirements Grid lists out the requirements (including application fees) for all colleges that use Common App. You can find this downloadable PDF on the Dashboard, College Search, and in our Solutions Center.

500+
colleges have no application fee for domestic students.

500+
colleges have no application fee for international students.

Fee waivers

A fee waiver lets you apply to a college without paying an application fee. Common App wants to make sure that application fees aren't a barrier for any student trying to submit an application. That's why we have the Common App Fee Waiver.

The Common App Fee Waiver waives the application fee of any college you apply to through Common App.

You can find the Common App Fee Waiver in the Profile section of the Common App tab. To apply for this fee waiver:

1. Answer "Yes" to the fee waiver statement.
2. Select all the indicators in the list that apply to you.
3. Enter your signature to certify your request.

Note
Your counselor will also be asked to confirm that you are eligible for this waiver. You will still be able to submit your application without a fee while your counselor confirms.

Keep in mind, the Common App Fee Waiver isn't the only fee waiver available to you. Many colleges also offer their own application fee waiver, specific to their school. Be sure to check with each college to understand their own fee waiver policies.

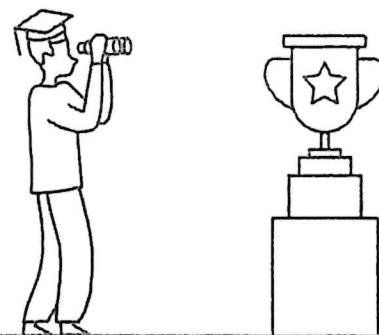Need more information on application fees and fee waivers? Visit appsupport.commonapp.org

575K+
applicants received a fee waiver in 2021–2022

$100M
in Common App fee waivers were granted in 2021–2022

Applying for scholarships with Scholarship Search

Common App has made it easy for applicants to access scholarship opportunities directly through your admissions application. We've partnered with College Board's Big Future Scholarship Search to give you the option to connect your information with Scholarship Search — saving all your hard work to reuse on the next application!

Scholarship Search makes it easier for students to apply for scholarships by allowing you to apply to multiple scholarships without having to re-enter your information each time. Instead, you can reuse your information from one application to another. Fill out one application and simply import it to a Scholarship Search profile to use again next time.

Scholarship Search works with many scholarship providers, including Scholarship America, Dell Scholars and Phi Theta Kappa. Check out their website for the full list of providers at https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search.
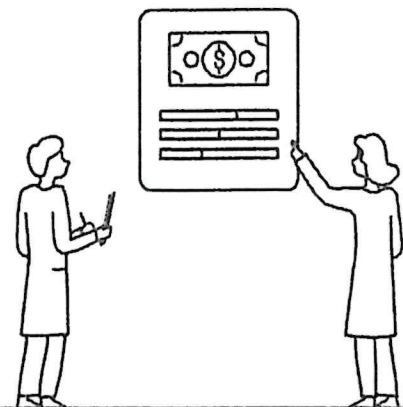
Use your Common App information to easily apply for scholarships

Once you submit an application in Common App, you will be guided to connect your accounts so we can transfer your Common App application information to your new Scholarship Search profile.

1. Connect to Scholarship Search in the Financial Aid Resources tab of your Common App.
2. Log in to your Scholarship Search account, or register for a new account.
3. Give permission for Common App to access and transfer your data to Scholarship Search.

That's it! You'll be notified when the transfer is complete and will be taken back to your Common App account. Learn more about connecting your Common App with Scholarship Search at appsupport.commonapp.org.

common app
READY

Understanding your financial aid offer

Congratulations, you've been accepted to college! First, celebrate this success. Next, figure out the cost of attending college.

Start by reviewing the financial aid offer letter from each college you've been accepted to. This letter can come with your acceptance notification via email, separately in the mail, or can be found on your student portal on the college's website (if you're not sure, call the college's financial aid office). Each school will offer a different amount of money, so it's important to review this information with your family or a trusted adult.

Every financial aid offer letter is different, but the key terms are similar across colleges. Use this guide to help make an informed financial decision about where to go to college.

Don't forget

It's okay to have questions! You can, and should, contact a college's financial aid office.

There are lots of reasons to pick a college, the best choice for you may not be the college with the lowest price tag.

Helpful terms

Cost of Attendance (or COA)

The estimated total cost of attending a college for one academic year, including direct and indirect costs.

Direct costs
Tuition, student fees, room & meal plan, usually paid directly to the school.
Indirect costs
Other costs of going to college such as books, travel, and personal expenses.

Note: the COA may change from year to year (e.g., if tuition increases annually or if you choose an alternative housing & meal plan). If the COA is not listed on your financial aid letter, contact the college's financial aid office and request the direct and indirect costs of attending.

Grants/Scholarships

Free money from the federal government, state, college, or outside/private organization that you do not have to pay back.

Note: Ask the college's financial aid office if grants and scholarships awarded to you are renewable each year, or if the amount can be adjusted based on other factors (e.g., maintaining a certain GPA, if outside scholarships will decrease your aid, etc.).

Loans

Money that must be repaid to the government or an institution (if you finish school or not). You can choose to accept the entire loan amount, a reduced amount, or none at all.

Federal Direct Loans
Subsidized Loans
- Up to $3,500 for first-year students (can increase sophomore, junior, & senior year).
- Amount determined when you complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- Interest does not accumulate while you are in school.
- You do not have to pay while you're in school. You receive a 6-month grace period after graduating from college or leaving school before starting to repay loans.

Unsubsidized Loans
- Up to $5,500 for first-year students (can increase sophomore, junior, & senior year).
- Amount determined when you complete the FAFSA.
- Interest does accumulate while you are in school.
- You do not have to begin paying on this loan until 6 months after you graduate college or leave school.

Note: Federal loans seem intimidating, but they are a great option to pay for college. Federal loans have lower interest rates and multiple repayment plans based on your income after college than other types of loans.

Other types of loans
(Parent) PLUS Loan
- A federal loan taken out by your parent/guardian that cannot be transferred to you.
- Requires that a parent/guardian undergo a credit check.
- Loan can cover up to the COA.
- Interest rate is typically higher.

Private Loans
- Loans offered by a bank, credit union, state agency, or a college.
- Typically have higher interest rates.
- May require you make payments while in school.

Work-study

Money earned throughout the academic year by working a qualifying part-time job. This money is capped at the amount listed in your offer letter and will come in a paycheck reflecting the hours you have worked. This money is not directly applied to your student account, it can be used for books, travel, & other personal expenses.

Note: On-campus jobs can be competitive. If you're eligible for a work-study job it is your responsibility to find a job. While working during college can help with expenses, full-time students should consider working part-time to avoid having a negative impact on academics.

In order to compare the costs at different colleges and estimate the amount you'll have to pay, check out this comparison calculator from The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Still have questions? Visit Federal Student Aid to learn more.

Next steps

After reviewing your options and selecting the college you plan to attend, you need to accept your financial aid package by the deadline stated in your letter and complete any other steps.

If your financial circumstances have changed, or you are unable to pay the remaining balance expected for a college, you can appeal for more financial aid. Every college has a different process, so contact the college immediately if you need to begin that process.