

Common App Instruction Guide

A step-by-step guide for students completing the Common Application

What is the Common App?

The Common Application is one online application platform used by more than 1,100 colleges. Students can enter much of their information once, add colleges, and then complete each school's individual requirements.

1. Create Your Account

Go to www.commonapp.org and select the option for first-year students. Use an email address you check regularly and a secure password. Enter your name and personal information carefully and consistently with your school records.

2. Add Colleges to Your List

Use the **College Search** area to find schools and add them to **My Colleges**. Adding a school lets you see its application requirements, deadlines, writing supplements, recommendations, testing policies, and fees.

3. Complete the Common App Sections

Work through the main application sections a little at a time. Typical sections include your profile, family, education, testing, activities, courses and grades when required, and writing.

4. Build Your Activities List

List the activities that best show how you spend your time outside class. Include school clubs, sports, jobs, volunteering, family responsibilities, community involvement, hobbies, and leadership. Use the description space to explain what you actually did and the impact you made.

5. Work on Your Personal Essay

Review the current Common App essay prompts and brainstorm before choosing a topic. Your essay should help an admissions reader understand something meaningful about you that is not obvious from grades and test scores. Draft early, revise several times, and proofread carefully.

6. Complete Each College's Questions

This step is easy to miss. Colleges can have their own questions and supplemental essays. Open every school under **My Colleges** and review every section. Do not assume that completing the main Common App means the application is finished.

7. Invite Recommenders When Required

Check each college's recommendation requirements. If teacher or counselor recommendations are needed, ask early. Follow your high school's process for requesting recommendations and give recommenders enough time before your deadlines.

8. Review Testing Requirements

Testing policies vary by college and can change. Check the current admissions policy for every school on your list before deciding whether to submit SAT or ACT scores. Also check whether test scores are relevant to specific scholarships or programs.

9. Track Your Deadlines

Know whether you are applying Early Decision, Early Action, Regular Decision, or another plan. Keep a separate deadline tracker and include application, financial aid, scholarship, recommendation, and testing deadlines.

10. Preview Before You Submit

Use the application's preview feature and read the entire application as if you were an admissions officer. Check names, dates, activities, essays, college-specific responses, and spelling. Make sure you did not accidentally mention another college in a supplemental essay.

11. Submit - Then Confirm

Submit each college application separately and complete any required payment or fee-waiver steps. After submitting, watch for confirmation and any instructions from the college about an applicant portal or missing materials.

Common App Checklist

- Create your Common App account
- Use a professional, frequently checked email address
- Add colleges to My Colleges
- Record each college's application deadline
- Complete profile, family, and education information
- Complete testing information as applicable
- Draft and polish the activities section
- Write and revise the Common App essay
- Check every college for supplemental essays/questions
- Request counselor/teacher recommendations when required
- Review each college's current SAT/ACT policy
- Check application fees and fee-waiver eligibility
- Preview and proofread each application
- Submit before the deadline
- Confirm submission and monitor college applicant portals

COLLEGE READY TIP

Do not try to complete the entire Common App in one sitting. Schedule 30-45 minute work sessions several times a week. Finish the factual sections first, then give yourself dedicated time for activities, essays, and college-specific supplements.

Before You Hit Submit: 5 Final Questions

- Did I complete every required section for this specific college?
- Did I answer the supplemental questions for the correct school?
- Did I proofread my application and essays?
- Are recommendations, test scores, or other materials required separately?
- Do I know what to watch for after submission?

Official resource: Common App - www.commonapp.org

College requirements and policies can change. Students should verify deadlines, testing policies, fees, and required materials directly with each college before submitting.