

# COMMON APP: SECTION BY SECTION

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TAKEN FROM THE  
STORY2 ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE COMMON APP  
[HTTPS://WWW.STORY2.COM/](https://www.story2.com/)

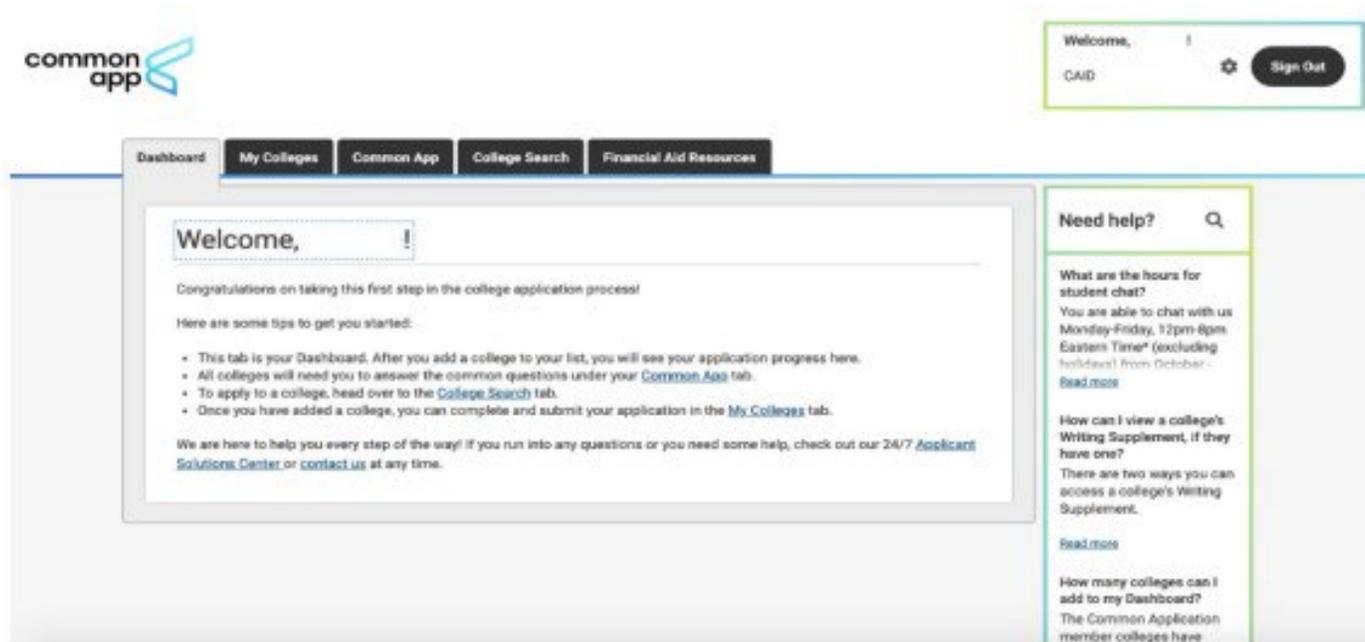
# START EARLY

This will save you so much time and stress during the school year. While some of the info the Common App asks for you should know off the top of your head (like your birthday), other information may require some investigation (such as your mom's graduate school or your counselor's email address).

A good tip is to go through the Common App once and fill out all the information you can. When you come across something you aren't sure of, make a list of those gaps on a piece of paper or a note in your phone, so you can follow up with the appropriate people (your parent/guardian, counselor, teacher, etc.) to get those questions answered.

# SETTING UP YOUR ACCOUNT

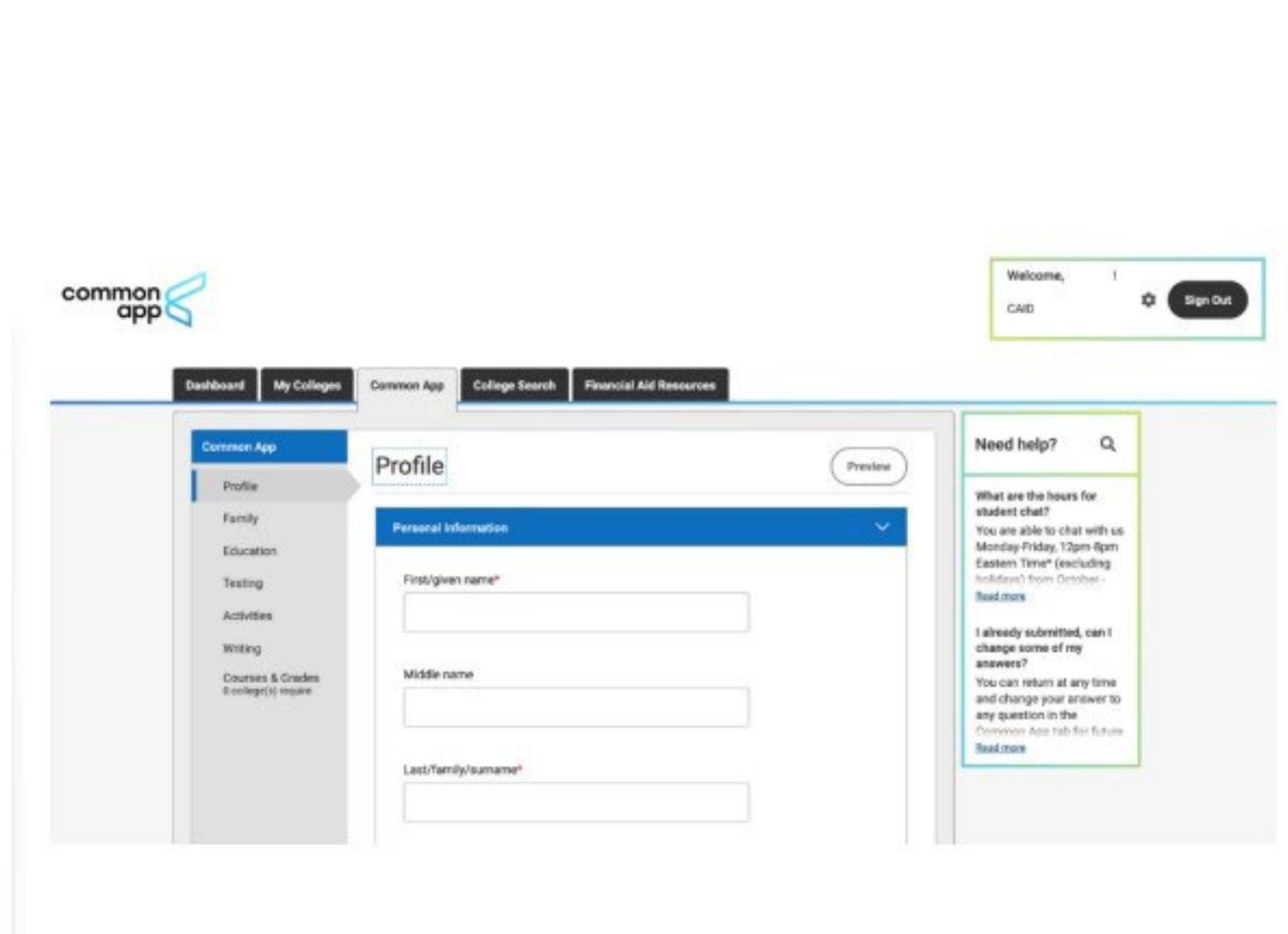
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When you create your Common App account, you'll see five tabs: Dashboard, My Colleges, Common App, College Search, and Financial Aid Resources. The application also has an extensive (though sometimes confusing and incomplete) Help section. Here's a screenshot:

# COMPONENTS

The Common App has two major components: 1) The general “Common App” section (which is sent to all colleges) 2) The college-specific sections (which will be completed on a college-by-college basis)



# PROFILE

This section asks for basic information about you. You should be able to complete most of this off the top of your head, but there may be some questions you're unsure of.

You'll need to provide the following personal information:

- Name
- Address
- Contact Details
- Demographics
- Geography
- Language
- Citizenship
- Common App Fee Waiver

One REALLY important point: make sure you use your full legal name, as it appears on your passport, driver's license, and/or other official forms of identification. This version of your name must match your transcript, financial aid materials, and standardized testing score reports. If not, colleges might lose track of your paperwork.

# PROFILE

**What does it mean when Common App asks, “would you like to share a different first name that you go by?”**

If you go by a nickname or shortened version of your name, or if you go by your middle name instead of your first name, and you would like the colleges and universities to which you apply to also refer to you by this name you should provide it in this field. For example, if your legal first name is William but you typically go by Will. You should avoid listing a casual or colloquial nickname, or your social media usernames. For example, Will would be appropriate to list in this field but not “Fresh Prince of Bel Air.”

**What if I have two permanent addresses, one with each parent?** You should put down the address of the home where you spend most of your time. A little bit later, you’ll be able to write down your other address in the “Family” section.

# PROFILE

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## **What if I don't have a home phone number?**

Select mobile as your preferred telephone number, and then provide that number. Under alternate phone number, select no alternate phone number.

## **Do I have to provide my religion and ethnic background?**

This is optional information, so you don't have to provide it. However, you do need to provide your citizenship status.

## **What if more than one of the ethnic options provided on the Common App apply to me?**

You may include all ethnic identities that apply to you.



# PROFILE

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## What email address should I use?

You should use one that you check regularly. If you don't check email regularly, the admissions process is a good time to get into the habit! If your current email address is something you don't want colleges seeing (i.e., something you created in middle school), you should probably create a new email account that is a version of your name.

**DO NOT USE YOUR SCHOOL EMAIL ADDRESS!! YOU CANNOT RECEIVE OUTSIDE EMAIL AND YOU WILL MISS A LOT OF IMPORTANT INFORMATION.**

# FAMILY

The Family section asks you about three main things:

- Household
- Parent(s) and/or Guardian(s)
- Sibling(s)

In this section, you provide information about the other members of your household. If you don't know certain information, such as country of birth, occupation, or education level, about your parent(s) or guardian or siblings, you may want to ask them for their help as you fill out the section!

# FAMILY

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**What if I don't live with my biological parents?** Under the Household tab, there is a question, “With whom do you make your permanent home?” which gives you a variety of options to choose from. I only have contact with one of my biological parents (they never married or are separated/divorced).

**Do I need to enter the information for the parent I have no/limited contact with?** You should enter as much information as you can for your non-custodial parent (the parent who does not live with you), even if that is only their first and last name. This is also something that you should discuss with your counselor so that they can include details about your family situation in the counselor letter or school report. If there are extenuating circumstances regarding your contact with this parent and/or their involvement in your life, you may want to consider sharing more context about family circumstances in the Additional Information section of the Common App. If you are applying to colleges/universities that require the CSS Profile to apply for financial aid, you may need to complete the Noncustodial Parent Profile or work with your school counselor to request a waiver.

**What if I don't know the date of my parents' divorce?** Try to find this information from one of your parents. Only the month and year are required. If I have step- or half-siblings, do I include their information in the "Siblings" section as well? Yes, you may indicate they are a step- or half-sibling where it says "Relationship."

## EDUCATION

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This section asks you lots of questions about your academic performance, so having a copy of your high school transcript at your side will be really helpful as you complete it! Specifically, you'll be asked for the following pieces of info:

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- Current or Most Recent School
- Other Secondary Schools
- Colleges & Universities
- Grades
- Current/Most Recent Year Courses
- Honors
- Community Based Organizations
- Future Plans



# NRCA SPECIFIC DETAILS FOR COMMON APP

**School CEEB Code: 343-223**

**High School Address: 7300 Perry Creek Rd, Raleigh, NC 27616**

**Phone number: 919-573-7900**

**Graduating Class Size: 121 (class of 2024)**

**Class Rank Reporting: NRCA does not rank**

**GPA Scale: 4.0 Weighted**

**Course Scheduling System: Yearly**

**\*Enter all courses for senior year except for Homeroom, Study Hall,  
and Early Dismissal**

# EDUCATION

## **What is a community-based organization (CBO)?**

A community-based organization (CBO) is any nonprofit group that assists students from backgrounds that are historically underrepresented in higher education with the college process (such as Posse, Questbridge, College Horizons, Minds Matter, College Possible, etc). You can add up to 3 CBOs by selecting them from the drop down list in the Education section, or select “Other” if you don’t see your CBO listed. You should include your CBO Advisor’s contact information when possible, and check with your CBO advisor regarding if they plan to submit an Other Recommendation.

# EDUCATION

**What should I do if I've attended several high schools?** You will need to add the school(s) in the Other Secondary/High Schools section. You will also need to include a brief response describing "why you left each of the above secondary/high schools." For example, perhaps you changed schools because your family moved or you transferred to a school outside of your district in order to pursue a specific academic opportunity. You will have up to 250 words for this short response, but you may not need to use the entire word count.

**Why does it ask if I have taken coursework at a college or university?** Colleges are interested in your experience with any college-level coursework as it can be an indicator of your ability to succeed in college. If you have taken any dual enrollment courses at a local college/university during your time in high school, attended any pre-college enrichment programs at a college/university, and/or enrolled in a college-level course for credit, you can list up to 3 institutions here. If you haven't had access to these opportunities, that's okay too!

# EDUCATION

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## My school doesn't have a class rank. What should I do?

There's no need to worry; admissions officers understand that many schools don't calculate class rank. If that's the case for you, you should still indicate your class size, but choose "none" for class rank. All colleges will receive a copy of your school profile, so they'll know that your school doesn't rank students.

Note: **NRCA does not rank.**

# EDUCATION

## **I don't have any honors or awards from high school. Do I leave the Honors section blank?**

Yes, but remember that this includes all honors at the school, state/regional, national, and international levels. If you've received something like a School Spirit Award or a Citizenship Award, these are honors you may include. On the right side, check off the "level" of your awards; the majority of students will choose "school" for most, if not all, awards. Note: you shouldn't list extracurricular positions such as "club president" here in the Honors section, those will be listed in the Activities section. And if you don't have any honors or awards (some high schools simply don't give out a great deal of them), that's completely fine and you can leave this section blank!

# EDUCATION

## **Can my future plans affect my admission to the university or college?**

Admissions committees are responsible for building a diverse student body in terms of backgrounds, ambitions, and academic interests. Think about it like this—wouldn't college be a bit dull if every single student was the exact same major? While this can impact decisions, you should remember that it's just one of many factors that colleges consider. Keep in mind that many students go into college undecided and many more change their majors! So be honest about what you think you want to study in college. Additionally, some colleges offer independent majors that allow students to build their own program of study. Generally, it won't hurt you to be undecided, but it could help you to have credible, compelling academic goals and interests.

## **What if I don't know what my career interests are?**

You can choose “undecided,” which doesn't make you look “bad” or unprepared. Colleges know that students' interests evolve and change throughout college, so it's okay to be undecided

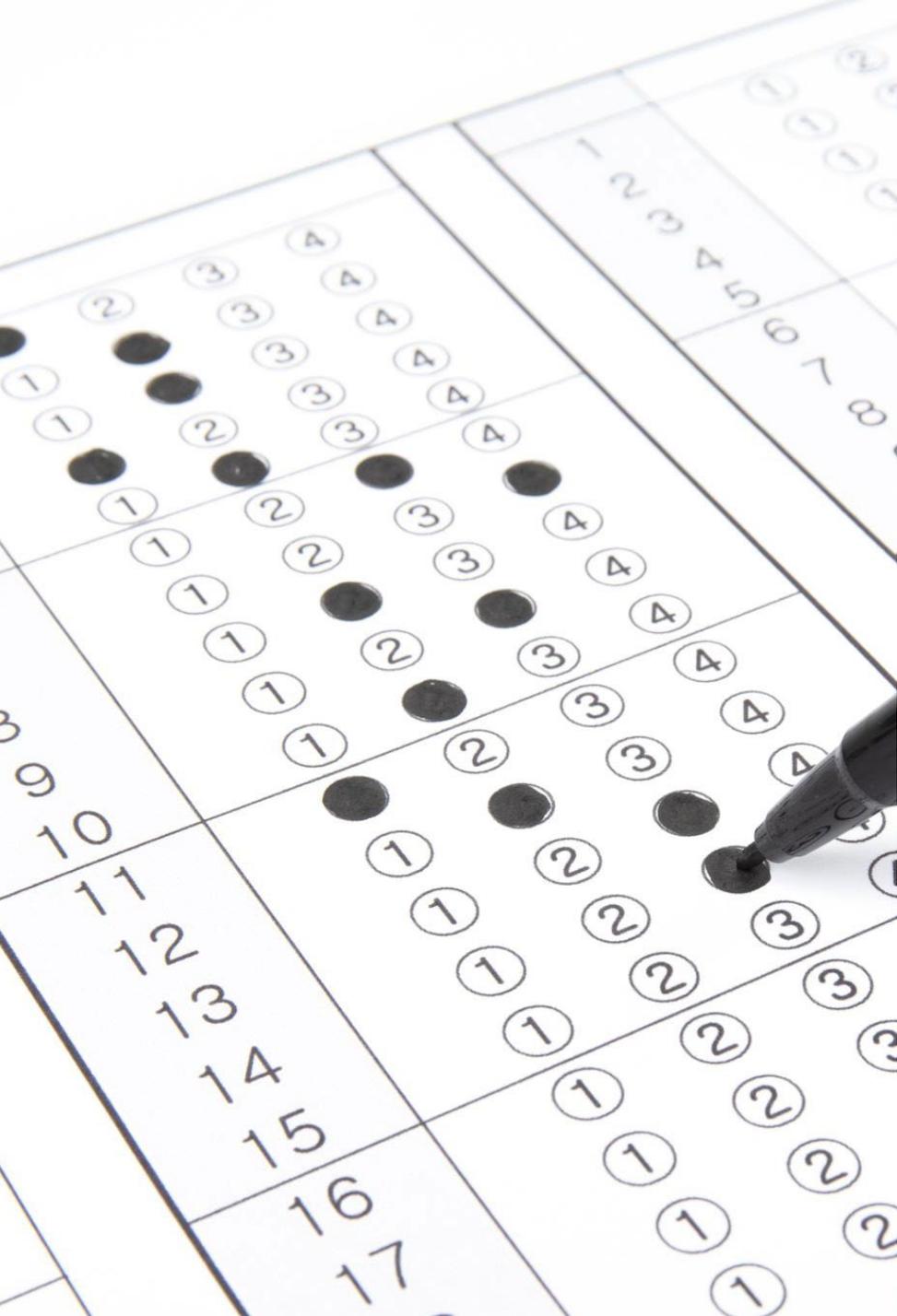
# EDUCATION

## **What if I don't know the highest degree I intend to earn?**

“Undecided” is fine here too! You don't want to say you'll earn a Ph.D. just for the sake of seeming ambitious.

## **What if I decide to change from one program to another—say from Engineering to Liberal Arts—once I'm in college?**

In most cases, that's okay too. However, if you're applying to a specific program or department, be sure to check with the college about how flexible they are with internal transfers. At some schools this can be quite difficult to do.



# TESTING

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Testing The questions in this section are both optional and adaptive. First, you'll indicate whether you want to provide testing information, and then you indicate which testing information you want to provide. This section also requires you to have taken standardized tests or have a clear plan for the tests you need to take (or the optional ones you want to take). You'll be asked about the following tests in this section:

- College Entrance (SAT/ACT)
- English for Non-Native Speakers (TOEFL, IELTS)
- Academic Subject Tests (AP, IB, etc.)
- Other tests



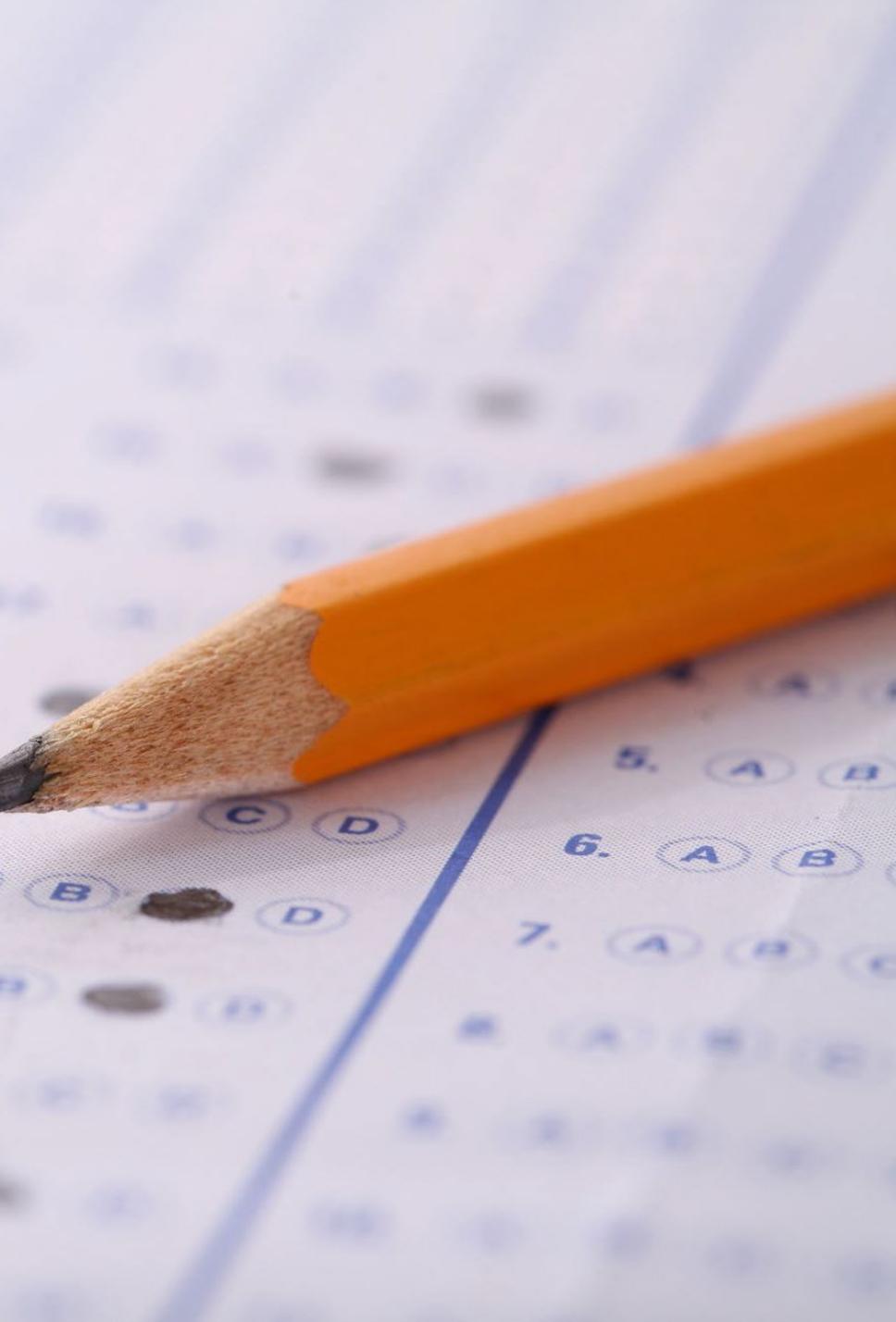
# TESTING

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If you are planning to apply test optional to any of the colleges on your list, leave this section blank and submit your scores directly to each college. You may choose to submit your scores directly through the College Board or ACT. Some colleges will also accept self-reported test scores by downloading the PDF of your score report and emailing it to the admissions office. In this case, you will still need to officially submit your testing to the college in which you enroll.

# TESTING

You should evaluate whether or not to submit test scores for each college on your list. Generally, a good strategy is to research the “middle 50” SAT and/or ACT range for each school -- that is 25% of students scored below, and 25% of students scored above. This information can usually be found on the Admission or Class Profile section of the school’s website, or through college research sites such as College Board’s Big Future. You can also google “[school name] Common Data Set” and review more detailed testing data in Section C: First-time, First-year (Freshman) Admission in the PDF. If your score falls within or above a college’s middle 50%, it may be helpful to submit your standardized test scores to that college.



# TESTING

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**If I submit testing, do I need to submit scores from all of my test sittings?**

This depends on whether the college super scores (i.e., takes the highest score for each section, regardless of the date of the exam), or if the college accepts Score Choice (which means that you can pick the highest individual test scores per section to submit). Some schools may require that students submit their entire testing history, so this is something to double-check on each college's website. Remember, that this is more important when officially submitting your test scores through the College Board or ACT (as opposed to self-reporting them on the Common App).

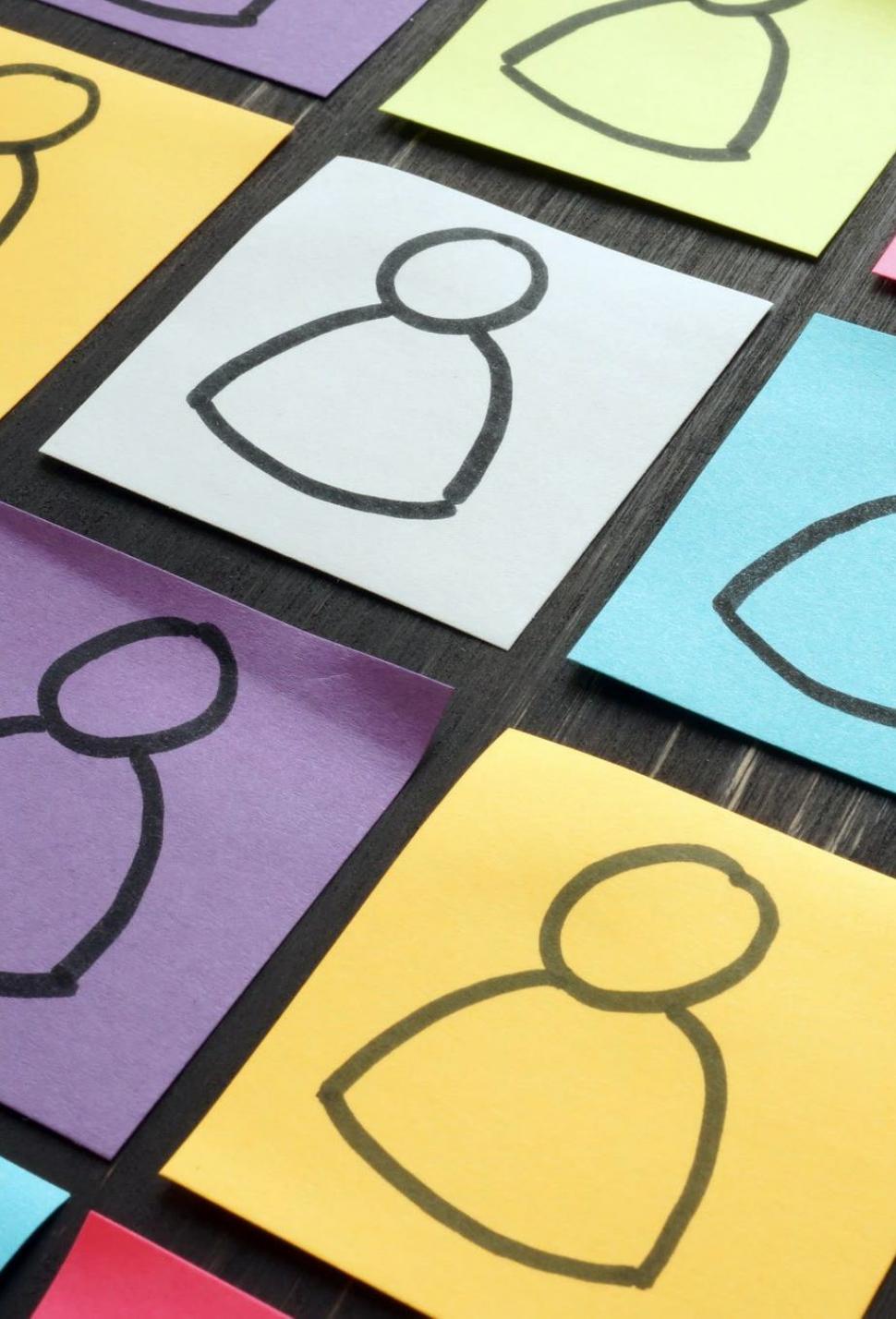
# TESTING

## **Should I report a past or future AP exam even if I haven't taken an AP course?**

Most schools will only give you credit for 3s, 4s, and 5s, so we usually recommend that students only list scores of 3 or above. It can be helpful to report scores of 3 and above from previously taken exams.

## **If I have taken the SAT and ACT, do I need to submit both scores? Which exam should I take in the first place?**

You do not have to submit both scores. Some students do, but submitting both scores is rarely, if ever, preferable to submitting solid scores from a single exam. You should take the exam you feel most comfortable with, and you can find that out by taking practice tests. Both the ACT and College Board provide a free practice test on their websites. Once you've chosen an exam, commit to it. It's better to study (without spending an excessive amount of time) for one exam than to split your attention and brain power between two exams that serve the exact same purpose and are viewed equivalently by colleges.



# ACTIVITIES

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The activities section is one of the most important parts of the application! This is how you show colleges how you've spent your time outside of the classroom.

You'll need to provide the following information for each activity:

- Activity type
- Position/Leadership description and organization name (if applicable)
- Details, honors won, and accomplishments
- Participation grade levels
- Timing of participation
- Hours spent per week
- Weeks spent per year
- If you intend to participate in a similar activity in college

# ACTIVITIES

Except for essays, the activities section offers you the best opportunity to show admissions committees who you are as a person. You can list up to 10 activities, along with brief descriptions to elaborate on what you accomplished.

Admissions officers are looking for quality over quantity, so don't worry if you don't have 10 separate involvements to list! Once you've chosen the type of activity from the drop-down menu, you'll have 50 characters to use for the position/leadership description and 100 characters to use for the organization name. You can think of these two sections, together, as a snapshot of the activity and your role. Make every character count by using common abbreviations and no fluff.

# ACTIVITIES

You may decide whether to use an organization's official name or a descriptive name. For instance, you might list "President, Wombat Club," but colleges won't know what a Wombat Club does. If the Wombat Club is a school spirit organization, then you could say, "President, school spirit club;" alternatively, you can describe the club's function in the following field.

The activity description "including what you accomplished and any recognition you received, etc." field is your opportunity to provide specific details about how you made a difference through each activity. You only have 150 characters to use in this response, so don't repeat anything you've already mentioned or indicated in the other fields. You want to be as specific and detailed as possible. A great way to do this is by focusing on SMART details: Specific, Measurable Actions with Results over Time.

# ACTIVITIES

If you have athletic accomplishments, include them in your response. For example, “Placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in state finals after running three hours each morning before school for six months.” If you raised a certain amount of money for a charity or you had an accomplishment at a job, then say so. For instance, “Folded 285 pairs of jeans in one day; a new store record.”

## **Does the order matter?**

The directions say to “list your activities in the order of their importance to you” so that is what admissions officers will interpret as they are reading your activity list. Your order of importance may be prioritized based on which activities you've had the most impact in or have had the most impact on you. The activities where you've had a significant leadership role, time commitment, accomplishment, and/or longer involvement usually go towards the top of the list.

# ACTIVITIES

**What if I don't remember how many hours or weeks I spent doing each activity?**

Make the best estimate that you can. This is just so colleges know how committed you were to the activities you were involved in. Colleges want students who are active and engaged community members and this is one way they can determine this.

**I don't have any activities to list because I'm always home taking care of my siblings or other responsibilities. Should I leave this section blank?**

Absolutely not! Taking care of your siblings, any family responsibilities, part-time or full time jobs are all serious commitments and something that admissions officers will want to know about! In this case, write down how many hours per week you spend taking care of your siblings, family responsibility, or work, and make sure you also indicate during which grades you did this, as well as when during the year it happened (i.e., school year and/or summer break). You can also describe these responsibilities in more detail in the Additional Information section or even in a personal essay.

# ACTIVITIES

## **What if I've participated in more than 10 activities during high school?**

Choose the activities where you feel your participation has made the greatest impact or the ones that are the most important to you. If you feel like you must report other activities, you may do so in the Additional Information section. Some colleges also invite students to submit resumes; however, resumes are not recommended for a college that doesn't invite them.

## **What's to stop students from fabricating accomplishments or activities?**

Aside from general ethical considerations, everything a student submits on the Common App may be corroborated by your school counselor's School Report. This report isn't quite a letter of recommendation, rather it's the narrative that your counselor submits along with your letter of recommendation.

# ACTIVITIES

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**Does it matter if I intend to continue with a similar activity in college?** It certainly can! If you're a recruited athlete, then you definitely want to indicate that you'll continue your sport. If you're an accomplished musician, colleges might want to know that you'll try out for the orchestra. Other more general activities may have less of an impact and colleges know that students often want to try new things once they get to college!

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**What if I can't describe the depth of my commitment or the magnitude of an accomplishment in 150 characters?** If you're asking this question, then you may have hit upon a strong topic for one of your essays or for a longer description in the Additional Information section! But 150 characters should be sufficient for most accomplishments. If a college allows you to submit an additional resume, this can also be an opportunity to talk about your involvements in more detail, especially if your role unfolded over several years with many accomplishments along the way.

# WRITING

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The writing section includes the following subsections:

- Personal Essay (250 - 650 words)
- Additional Information (optional essay up to 650 words)
- Covid-19 Community Disruption Essay (optional essay up to 250 words).

The essays are the most intimidating part of the admissions process for many students. When you're applying to college, most of the information (as you now know) is pretty cut and dry. You have your grades, your classes, your test scores, and a list of your activities. All of that is fact-based. The essays are designed to reveal your character, the stuff below the surface that most people may not know about you. A successful admissions essay gives admissions officers a glimpse into your world. By telling the admissions officer a story, you'll be able to authentically connect with them.

You can assume that the people reading your essay are intelligent, informed human beings. You should NOT assume they'll understand you, agree with you, or have any prior reason to like you. Remember that your application conveys a lot of information about you (classes, grades, test scores, your hometown, ethnicity, and activities). These things can be a jumping-off point for an essay, but your essay should illustrate, not repeat important information. The goal of the essay is to convey that you're smart, capable, personable, and that you're going to add value to a college's community. This may seem like a tall order, but many students find it liberating too! After all, you get to imagine your best self and tell a story that illustrates who that version of "you" is. This may sound counterintuitive, but the essay isn't about answering a specific question. The questions are starting points; if your essay is strong, readers will engage with it wholeheartedly. One of the best things you can do to assist yourself in the writing process is give yourself ample time to work through different ideas and essays. Don't get too attached to the first essay you write; it may not be the best that you're capable of.

# WRITING

# THE PERSONAL ESSAY

Students often make the mistake of writing Personal Essays like they write essays for English or History class. Great essays are built around stories, not arguments. Whichever prompt you choose, it should reveal your character, not rehash your achievements. The best essays focus on a Defining Moment—a moment when you changed, learned, grew as a person, or took action.

The following slides will give you some information to help with each prompt.

# ESSAY PROMPT 1

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

This is the prompt most students find easiest. If you don't know which prompt to pick, try this one! It allows you to reflect on your identity or values, but you can also write about any story that has shaped you. Everyday quirks and details can be great topics for this essay. An example: several years ago, our intern Paul wrote about the time his principal asked him to cut his kinky hair. He refused and asked his parents to help him find another school!

# ESSAY PROMPT 2

**2. 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?**

This prompt has two great advantages. First, it invites reflection: you're meant to think about that obstacle and draw your own conclusions about it. Second, it's perfect for storytelling because most stories are about overcoming some sort of challenge, setback, or failure!

Explore the failure part. Remember: you don't need to have caused the failure to answer this prompt. Maybe you were a bystander, or you heard about it another way. Classroom failures that turn into triumphs are a cliché; it's best to avoid writing about them. If the failure is obvious on your transcript, the Additional Information section is the best place to discuss it.

# ESSAY PROMPT 3

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

This prompt may make you think about protest and activism (such as the Women’s March or a movement to start the school day later). While these can be great topics, the “challenge” can be intellectual too (such as a book that changed your way of thinking or a lively classroom discussion). Keep in mind that the belief you challenge may be your own!



# ESSAY PROMPT 4

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**4. 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?**

This is a new question this year, and a timely addition given everything that we all went through over the past year. There are two points to this question, and the key is to find a balance between your reflection and showing the action(s) you have taken based on how the gratitude has affected or motivated you.

# ESSAY PROMPT 5

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

This can be a tricky prompt, because it's very easy to oversimplify your "period of personal growth" as an instant change. Anything that sounds like a big "a-ha" moment—e.g., "that was the day I learned all people are alike"—is probably a cliché and not a good place to land. This essay should reveal smaller, more enduring changes—memorable moments when your perspective shifted, when you took on something new or developed a different outlook. It sometimes helps to think about the "period of personal growth" as "maturation," an ongoing process, and seek moments that reveal the larger trajectory of your growth.

# ESSAY PROMPT 6

**6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that 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?**

Whether you're passionate about physics, the American Revolution, or the implications of artificial intelligence in society, this question allows you to discuss whatever excites you. Remember, this does not have to be something that is academic, and, in fact, it can be a great opportunity to share another interest or passion that might not come through otherwise. Perhaps you are a prospective math major who is passionate about economic inequality or a prospective business major who loves botany and is an avid gardener. Admissions officers want to get to know the "whole" you so don't be afraid to share. One piece of advice if you choose this prompt--it can be very tempting to focus your essay on the actual idea or concept. While this is important (especially if your passion is rather obscure), you will want to make your action and learning experience the focus of the essay.



# ESSAY PROMPT 7

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**7. 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.**

Question number seven is one of the reasons that students should think of the prompts as suggestions as opposed to firm rules. Perhaps your original essay has radically shifted (even though it fit neatly into a prompt at one point) or maybe you just wanted to go in your own direction from the start.

Whatever the case, you can always check off prompt #7 if you are uncertain where your essay might fit. This prompt should also give you assurance that it is okay to stray from one of the assigned prompts. It's best NOT to use a critical paper you wrote for one of your classes.



# GENERAL ESSAY ADVICE

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**What do college admissions officers say I should write about?** There are no pre-set "good topics." Start with your own experiences and use specific moments to show who you'll be in college and life. You should be writing the essay that YOU want to write (not the essay that you think will "look good" to admissions officers).

**Hasn't any topic I might write already been written by thousands of other students?** Many students participate in community service. Many students travel. And many students play sports. But you're the only person who's had your specific experiences! Often the best essays come from common everyday moments that reveal your character and humanity. Take those general experiences and focus on moments that are really your own.

**Does my essay have to be about me?** YES! It's your essay and it's important that you take ownership of your thoughts and ideas. One common mistake students make is focusing their essay on a person who's had a strong influence on their life. Your essay should be about you, whether you're the protagonist, an observer, an investigator, or a scholar--or maybe what you learned from another person.

# GENERAL ESSAY ADVICE

**How personal should the Personal Essay be?** Here's a way to decide: if you're having dinner with someone whom you've just met, is this a story you would tell them? How would you tell the story if your goal was to continue the conversation? It's important to be honest and genuine in your essays, to reveal what matters to you, and even to illustrate when you've made mistakes. But don't overshare, and don't discuss anything that you want to remain private.

**Why shouldn't I write about my awards or accomplishments?** Your academic awards and extracurricular accomplishments will show up in other parts of your application. Use each essay to add more insight into your character and to reveal the thoughts, feelings, relationships, and motivations behind those accomplishments.

**How important is it that my essay be polished?** Admission officers look for authenticity, not slickly polished essays. It's much better to write in your own voice than to have someone else edit it. However, you should still proofread for spelling and grammar and take time to make sure the essays represent your best work.

## GENERAL ESSAY ADVICE

**The essay directions say I can write between 250 and 650 words. That means I can write just 250 words, right?** Once they get started, most students find that they write more than the upper limit and then need to edit it down to a shorter length! However long your essay is, make sure that every word counts. As the saying goes, “it should be as long as necessary, but not longer.” (If you want to see the power of brevity in action, take two minutes to read the Gettysburg Address or one of Shakespeare's sonnets.)

**Can I make different versions of the personal essay? Should I?**

This is probably not necessary. The Common App wants your application to be truly “common.” It discourages students from customizing or updating essays for different colleges but does allow you to make changes to your essay after the first submission. Aside from a minor correction, there should be no reason to make changes to the essay. If a major life event occurs after you’ve submitted your first application, consider putting that in the Additional Information essay. If you come up with a topic you think is much stronger, finish all your supplements first and then see if you still need to revise your main essay.

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For many students, and even some college counselors, the Additional Information section is the most baffling element of the Common App. “Circumstances or qualifications” can mean almost anything. Is it another essay? A resumé? An extended activity list? A space for accolades? A writing sample? It can be any of the above—or it can be left blank—but students must think carefully about how, and whether, to use it. In this section you’ll be presented with the question “Do you wish to provide details of circumstances or qualifications not reflected in the application?” If you answer yes, a text box will appear that allows you to provide up to 650 words of any additional information you wish to share.

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Some “circumstances or qualifications” will be obvious for certain students. Here are some examples of topics to discuss:

- Any extenuating circumstance(s) that may have affected your academic performance
- Components of your identity, such as ethnicity, nationality, gender or sexual orientation, or disability that you feel colleges should know about
- A significant extracurricular activity (such as service, leadership, or artistic performance at the state or national level) that isn't fully described elsewhere
- Major extracurricular or academic work, such as scientific research or creative writing
- Employment or entrepreneurship
- Extended activity list (only if activities are truly compelling)

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### **Will it look bad if I leave this section blank?**

No. This section is completely optional. However, if you do choose to complete it, admission officers take this section seriously, so make sure you use this section constructively and positively.

### **Can I use this space for an extra essay?**

You can, but you probably don't want to unless the essay is really essential for colleges' understanding of what you'll contribute to classes or campus life. Less is often more. Students who don't feel that they have obvious topics such as the above will most likely leave this section blank. That is 100% okay.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

How should I write about uncomfortable situations in my personal or family life?

If there were any extenuating circumstances at home or in school that affected your academic performance, you should complete this section. When you're writing about these situations, always stick to the facts. For example, "My sophomore year was a difficult year for me and my family. In the fall, my father lost his job, and my parents went through a divorce. In the spring, I was diagnosed with mono. As you can see on my transcript, my grades suffered that year. Over time, I have learned how to better manage my schoolwork, activities, and family responsibilities. I now feel very well prepared to balance all the different parts of college life."

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: COVID-19 COMMUNITY DISRUPTION ESSAY

Beginning with the 2020-21 application cycle, and continuing into the 2021-22 cycle, the Common App has added another optional, short-answer question in the Additional Information section known as the Community Disruption or COVID-19 supplemental essay. The prompt reads: “Community disruptions such as COVID-19 and natural disasters can have deep and long-lasting impacts. If you need it, this space is yours to describe those impacts. Colleges care about the effects on your health and well-being, safety, family circumstances, future plans, and education, including access to reliable technology and quiet study spaces.” and if you select Yes to “Do you wish to share anything on this topic?” you’ll have up to 250 words to share “how these events have impacted you.”



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: COVID-19 COMMUNITY DISRUPTION ESSAY

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Keep your response concise. This question has a 250 word limit, so it is important to keep your response concise. Focus on the facts Stick with a “just the facts” explanation of how the pandemic impacted your educational experience. This might include:

- Illness (to either you or a loved one)
- Economic impact on your family
- Adjustment to virtual instruction
- Inability to take specific standardized tests
- Inability to visit specific college campuses
- Disruption to key extracurricular activities

Remember that admissions officers will be reading this essay for context. The goal of this question for the admissions officers is to assess how COVID-19 may have adversely impacted your educational experience. This context will provide them with a useful lens to view the rest of your application.

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: COVID-19 COMMUNITY DISRUPTION ESSAY

Don't spend the space talking about your thoughts.

For most folks, a day doesn't go by without reading a COVID-19 related news story or having a conversation about the pandemic. We get it, you are living this and thinking about it constantly. However, this essay is not the proper space for your thoughts about living through this. It's not necessary to talk about how you turned the experience into a positive. We genuinely hope that you have been able to use your time during the pandemic to do something positive. However, this essay is not about showing how you made the most of a bad situation. Other parts of the application, such as the activities section, or other essays will allow you to talk about new projects or initiatives that you started. This essay is not the place.

Don't write your main personal statement about COVID-19. We mentioned this earlier, but it should be repeated: you should not write your main personal statement about your COVID-19 experience. This is one of the reasons that this optional essay is being offered: colleges want to learn more about your stories (and not just what happened to you during the pandemic). If you write your personal essay on COVID-19 it is simply a missed opportunity to share something that reaches back before and will continue after COVID-19 is history.

# MY COLLEGES

Once you add colleges and universities via the College Search tab, you'll see additional sections to complete under the My Colleges tab. These sections will vary from school to school, and usually include:

- Entry term
- Degree Status
- Financial Aid Preference
- Academic Program
- Family (whether you have had family members attend the college)
- Previous Contact with Institution (interview, visit)
- Writing Supplement (college specific essays and short answers)

Many colleges have additional essay questions, called Supplemental Essays, included in their college page. Some schools may include important additional information about their supplements on their website.



# MY COLLEGES

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The Common App is “adaptive,” meaning that some questions are tailored to you based on your prior responses. Adaptive questions are common in supplements. For instance, a school might have different questions for different academic programs, so it won’t reveal the questions until after you’ve indicated which academic program you’re applying to.

Don't reuse the topic of your Personal Essay for supplement essays. Each supplement essay is an opportunity to reveal a different aspect of your character and experiences and your fit for that specific college. Although there are many different prompts, you can answer almost any question by describing a specific moment when you learned, changed or made a difference.

## MY COLLEGES

**Is it OK to recycle supplemental essays for different colleges?** We don't recommend recycling essays for another college. If you want to repurpose it however, it's okay to discuss some of the same experiences and important moments in your life making a specific connection with each college. Colleges use supplements to determine the "fit" of a prospective student in their community. Supplements can also be one of the biggest missed opportunities because students often don't take the time to tailor them to each particular school.

**How firm are word limits?** This depends on the college. Some colleges will set exact limits by the word or character. In these cases, you should stick to the limits. Other colleges will be vague and say "about a page" or "a paragraph." In these situations, it's best to follow their suggestions as closely as possible and err on the side of a shorter essay if you can.

# INTERVIEW/VISIT

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## **How important is the “interview/visit” question?**

Colleges are sensitive to what they call “demonstrated interest” (things like visits and interviews). That’s why it’s important to fill out a registration form when you visit a college or meet an admissions officer at your school or a local college fair or event. If you’re not able to visit the campus in-person, check and see what virtual opportunities are available to attend such as a virtual information session, student panel, virtual campus tour, virtual admissions/alumni interview, or other webinars and virtual events. Even an email to your regional admissions officer can help. But don’t worry: colleges understand if you can’t visit in-person because of cost, distance, or other pandemic-related constraints.