



A real-time digital supplement to

College Admission: From Application to Acceptance, Step by Step
by Robin Mamlet and Christine VanDeVelde

Covering the August 2013 changes to the Common Application

To learn about the book, please visit CollegeAdmissionBook.com

The Application Form

REQUIRED SIGNATURE

I certify that all information submitted in the admission process—including this application and any other supporting materials—is my own work, factually true, and honestly presented, and that these documents will become the property of the institution to which I am applying and will not be returned to me. I understand that I may be subject to a range of possible disciplinary actions, including admission revocation, expulsion, or revocation of course credit, grades, and degree should the information I have certified be false.

I acknowledge that I have reviewed the application instructions for the college receiving this...

—Binding certification students must sign, from the Common Application

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Filling out the application form may seem like the simplest—and most tedious—step in the admission process, but it plays a crucial role. The information colleges ask for in the application form serves as the foundation of the admission file. Providing your biographical data, academic record, testing, extracurricular activities and future plans—accurately, completely, and on time—tells a college who you are. Do not underestimate the power you have over how an admission officer will view you, simply based on how you complete the application form.

As you begin this step in the process, go to the website of each school to which you are applying and see what applications they offer or support—whether that is the college’s own

unique form, the standardized Common Application, or a form through another electronic application provider such as XAP. Also note whether they accept online submissions, paper applications or both.

THE BASICS, STEP BY STEP

Meet the four tabs

We suggest you begin by going to commonapp.org. After you create an account, you will see four tabs across the top of the page:

Dashboard—Here you will monitor and keep track of your application, including deadlines, requirements, and progress for each school to which you are applying.

Checkpoints

- ✓ The application form is the foundation of your admission file. Your job is to make sure it is complete, accurate, and submitted on time.
- ✓ The information you provide in the application provides further context for the admission officer and is yet another opportunity to show who you are.
- ✓ The application must be the student's own work at all times.
- ✓ Completing the application is, in part, an exercise in following directions. Let your individuality show, but follow the rules set by the colleges.
- ✓ The student's signature on the application pledges he has upheld the highest standards of honesty, character, and moral and ethical principles. Take it seriously. Colleges do.

My Colleges—This is where you will find and complete the college-specific supplements for each college to which you intend to apply. You must add a college to your My Colleges list via

Each year, nearly one million students file their applications using the Common Application, accepted by more than five hundred colleges and universities. Many other schools, most notably public universities, have their own applications, and there are also a number of other electronic application providers colleges may use. For the purposes of this chapter we will use the Common Application as our template. The information colleges request in their application forms is, in most cases, broadly similar and serves a common purpose for all schools. You should be able to easily adapt our advice about the Common Application to the application of any other college to which you are applying or any other application supplier you are using.

the College Search tab before you will be able to use this screen. We will discuss this section specifically later in the chapter.

Common App—This is the infrastructure of your application and includes six sections:

1. Profile
2. Family
3. Education
4. Testing
5. Activities
6. Writing

We will explain section by section what information is being requested, why colleges want this information when relevant, and our best advice for how to provide it.

College Search—Under this tab, college searches can be performed a variety of ways—including by city, state, distance from a specific zip code and by entering a specific college

name—and using multiple search terms. Information such as phone numbers, deadlines, fees, and recommendation requirements can be seen by clicking the school name link from the “results list.” You can also simply enter the names of the colleges individually from your own researched list. Once you add a school, it will appear in My Colleges.

Note that the Common App uses “smart questions” technology. Questions are presented a few at a time and appear only if they are applicable to you. For example, if you select your parents’ marital status as “Divorced” in the Family section, that will prompt new questions, such as “With whom do you make your permanent home?” Also, as you navigate the application, help topics actively appear in the right column of the page with items directly relevant to the section you are working on.

The Common App Tab

1. Profile

The Profile consists of eight sections: Personal Information, Address, Contact Details, Demographics, Geography, Language, Citizenship, and Common App Fee Waiver.

Personal Information

- **What:** Name, birth date, phone number, sex.
- **Why:** This section is the framework for your application, allowing the admission office to accurately identify you.
- **How:**
 - Use your full legal name as it appears on your social security card and make

sure it is consistent with your high school records and the name you used for your SAT or ACT testing. It will also need to be consistent with your financial aid application. (FYI, for financial aid, your name *must* be the one used on your social security card.)

- If your legal name is James Ryan Washington and your friends and family call you Jake, check “Yes” when asked if you have ever used any other names and enter Jake as your “preferred name.”

Address

- **What:** Permanent home address, as well as any temporary or alternate addresses. The Common App will check your address during registration and if unable to verify the address will alert you.

Contact Details

- **What:** Email and phone numbers.
- **Why:** This information provides the details that allow the admission office to communicate with and deliver information to you quickly and easily.
- **How:**
 - Make sure your email address is appropriate. If you’re using loves2party@hotmail.com, start a new email account.

Demographics

- **What:** This section asks for information about religious preference, military service, and race; responding is optional.
- **Why:** Many colleges believe it is important to enroll a class that is diverse on a

number of dimensions. Colleges can choose to “suppress” or blank out information on some questions such as SSN, test scores, religious preference, and disciplinary history.

- **How:** We strongly recommend you answer all optional questions. You will be best served by giving admission officers as accurate and clear a picture of who you are as you possibly can.

Geography

- **What:** Birthplace, countries lived in, and number of years in and out of United States.
- **Why:** Your answers to these questions provide context for admission officers so that they can evaluate your application with a better idea of who you are. If you live in Manhattan but were born in El Centro, California, or now reside in Des Moines but were born in Vietnam and lived there until you were ten, this background adds to the admission officers’ understanding.

Language

- **What:** Number of languages, proficiency.
- **Why:** Again this information provides context for the admission officers evaluating your application.

Citizenship

- **What:** Citizenship status and Social Security number.
- **How:**
 - Providing your Social Security number on the application form is required for U.S. citizens and permanent residents

applying for financial aid via the FAFSA.

- In providing citizenship status, undocumented students should select “Other” from the online menu.
- If you do not have a SSN, leave this entry blank.

Common App Fee Waiver

- **What:** Guidelines for eligibility for application fee waivers and certification that you will qualify.
- **Why:** While the Common Application is free, colleges may require submission of an application fee. Colleges realize application fees may present a financial hardship for some families, and fee waivers are available to students meeting eligibility requirements.
- **How:**
 - If you feel your financial circumstances might qualify you for an application fee waiver, check “Yes” to certify that you meet the eligibility criteria. Your school counselor must confirm and verify your eligibility for the fee waiver. Once confirmed, the fee waiver will be applied to all colleges to which you apply and payment will be waived when you submit the Common Application. More information about fee waivers appears later in this chapter.

2. Family

- **What:** Background on your household, parents or legal guardians, as well as siblings if applicable, includes contact information, marital status, occupation,

and education. This section also includes questions about the applicant's spouse or child if applicable.

- **Why:** The particulars of home life are meaningful to colleges trying to get to know who you are. The student who lives with her father has a different home life from the student who lives with both parents, as does the student who is in a foster home or the applicant who is married or has a child. Colleges want to take into account circumstances that may have an impact on how they view an applicant's grades or activities—for example, a student who reports that a parent is deceased, where the date of death indicates it occurred during the junior year in high school.
- **How:** Respond fully to every question. This level of detail may seem irrelevant, but it helps round out the picture of an applicant. For example, the colleges attended by parents and siblings and the level of education attained tell the school whether there was a college-going culture in the home. Having a college-going culture in and of itself is neither a positive nor a negative, but knowing what a student's home life is like provides admission officers with context.

3. Education

- **What:** Information about high school attendance, additional school experiences, and contact details for your guidance or college counselors, your current academic record—GPA, current courses, and honors—as well as your career interests

and the highest degree you intend to earn is self-reported in this section.

- **Why:** Providing this information to the colleges allows them to begin evaluating your application even if they haven't yet received official transcripts. The current-courses section is particularly important for students whose high schools do not include senior-year courses on a transcript until grades are available. Information about your counselor is important because if the admission officer has questions or concerns, you want her to be able to reach out to the person most likely to have answers—your high school counselor—as quickly and easily as possible. In addition, details such as the circumstances of an interruption in your high school education provide valuable context.
- **How:**
 - Enter your guidance counselor or high school college counselor information—name, phone, and email—correctly! The college wants the name of the person who completes the School Report (SR). Check with your high school if you are unsure about whose contact information to include.
 - If your schooling was interrupted by illness, a displacement due to a natural disaster, military service, travel, disciplinary issues, or other circumstances, note it here and follow up with an explanation in the Additional Information space in the Writing section. You can request that your high school counselor include an explanation, but that will not substitute

for your own.

- List every high school, college, or enrichment program you have attended or participated in. If you don't feel proud of your record at one of the schools you attended, report it anyway. Failure to do so can have serious consequences.
- Obtain class rank, size, and grading information from your high school college counselor or guidance counselor.
- Many high schools do not rank students. If your high school doesn't, simply select "None" from the menu.
- Note that the form asks for any organization that provided you free assistance with your application. Examples might include the Posse Foundation or Questbridge. The dropdown menus provide lists.
- The credit value of your current courses is important for the admission office to know, so include it.
- By entering your current courses here, you are committing to completing them. See the questions at the end of this chapter for more information.
- "Honors" in this section refers to academic honors only—not sports or citizenship awards.
- Colleges want to get a sense of your interests, goals, and intentions in order to build a picture of who you are at this moment in time. In many cases, your answers do not commit you to anything—if you write down neuroscience as an academic interest,

you are not committing to that course of study.

- If you don't see the academic area you are interested in pursuing in the menu, select "Other."

4. Testing

- **What:** Information about college entrance testing—the SAT and ACT; academic subject tests, including AP, IB, SAT Subject Tests, and A-Levels; English testing for non-native speakers, including TOEFL, IELTS, PTE Academic; and optional reporting for any other relevant testing done in grades 9 through 12.
- **Why:** Providing this information to the colleges allows them to begin evaluating your application even if they haven't yet received official scores. You will still need to follow up and ensure the colleges receive all official reports from testing agencies.
- **How:**
 - Check with each college to which you are applying for their testing reporting requirements by going to their website or you may find the requirements within the college-specific supplements under My Colleges on the Common Application.
 - On SAT/ACT testing, provide your highest scores in each area even if those scores are from different test dates.
 - Answer "Yes" if you have scheduled future testing so that the admission office can anticipate receiving further score reports. The colleges want to see

your best scores, so making them aware that there may be additional testing reported will help them track this.

- For AP/IB/SAT Subject Tests, report your best scores. You do not have to include scores you wish to withhold, unless the college requires you to submit them.
- If you are applying to test optional schools, you can choose not to self-report or choose to report a different set of tests. (Some colleges will require you to submit AP or Subject Tests though not the ACT or SAT, for example. Check the websites of every college to which you are applying to understand their testing requirements.) If you are applying to schools where testing is required as well as test-optional schools, most of the test-optional schools will have the test scores suppressed on the applications. However, if you want your scores to be considered by a test-optional school—for example, to be eligible for merit scholarships—official scores will need to be submitted.
- Some colleges allow submission of AP scores under flexible testing policies but while AP scores may be self-reported here, official scores are not usually sent as part of the admission process.

5. Activities

- **What:** Activities and work experience, including the number of hours per week

and per year, positions held, honors, employers, and your plans to participate in these pursuits in college.

- **Why:** Admission officers are interested in how you spend your time, both to see who you are now and to understand how you may participate in the college community. Your list may include sports, volunteer activities, school clubs, part-time work, or caring for your siblings. If you are uncertain about what to include, look back at Chapter 6 to see the many ways in which colleges anticipate students spend their time outside the classroom. The goal here is simply to reflect the day-to-day reality of your life.
- **How:**
 - More activities are not necessarily better. The form asks for your principal activities—those that have the most meaning for you or where you have spent a lot of time. Plenty of space is provided to give you flexibility, not with the expectation that you will fill every line.
 - Prioritize your activities and work experience. The form instructs you to list items in their order of importance to you. Use a piece of scratch paper to do a rough draft with this in mind before you enter the information. You can reorder activities using the up and down arrows in each activity reading pane.
 - Don't overstate your hours. Admission officers know how many hours there are in the week.
 - Describe activities in a way that reveals

as much as possible. Some positions and honors are self-explanatory—for example, “Quarterback,” or “MVP.”

- Other activities require more explanation—for example, fly fishing. Select “Other club/activity” from the menu and write “Fly fishing” in the space under Position/Leadership. Sentences won’t fit here, but phrases will. For example, “Fly fishing, Fished major rivers in 12 states.” In the Details, Honors and Accomplishments section, you could add, “Expert at tying flies, business selling woolly bugger ties to sports store.”
- If you care for your siblings every day without pay, you would select “Family Responsibilities” from the menu and enter, for example, “Caring for siblings, 6 years, 5 days a week, walk to school, evening meal preparation, homework supervision until parents return from jobs.”
- For each of your activities, you have two lines to work with: “Positions/Leadership” and “Details, Honors and Accomplishments.” Don’t feel confined by the titles of those headings—use both areas to tell the school what you want them to know. If that is still too confining, you can submit additional information, but check the directions on the Common Application page of the college or the college’s website first to see if they will accept it and it will be read. If it is still unclear, check with the college.
- If you have a lot of activities, group

them by type—Student Government, Community Service, or Work. For example, under the heading Work (Paid), list “babysitting, Gap retail, house-sitter, and tutor” on the Position/Leadership line if there isn’t enough room to list each separately.

- If you group activities, separate out any national or international participation and recognition.
- While you may need to abbreviate to fit your text into the box provided since there is a limited amount of space, especially in the field for “Details, Honors and Accomplishments” (allows for 50 characters), don’t save space by using abbreviations the admission officer won’t understand.

Under Position/Leadership don’t enter: AISF participant

Enter: Artificial Intelligence Science Fair participant

Then, under “Details, Honors and Accomplishments,” enter: Invitation-only robotics competition, sonar systems, paper considered for publication.

- You may also utilize the Additional Information area in the Writing section to include anything that will not fit in the Activities section.
- If your activity type is not listed, select “other club/activity” from the drop-down list. You can specify in the box for position/leadership and “Details, Honors and Accomplishments.”

6. Writing

There are three sections here: The Personal Essay (Chapter 13 covers essays in depth), Disciplinary History and Additional Information.

The Personal Essay

- **What:** Students can choose from five essay prompts, which may change from year to year. Each essay will have an enforced maximum word limit of 650 words and an enforced minimum word limit of 250 words.
- **How:**
 - You should not customize your essay or make it college-specific because the Personal Essay in the Writing section of the Common Application will go to all of your schools.
 - See Chapter 13 for a full discussion of essays, including how to get started and what the colleges are looking for.

Disciplinary History

- **What:** This section features affidavits requiring students to disclose any academic or behavioral misconduct that occurred on school premises or any criminal conviction, misdemeanor or felony.
- **Why:** Colleges want to understand your stumbles as well as your achievements—and they want to see what you have learned from them. You can count on fair treatment for students who have made mistakes.

Additional Information

- **What:** The Additional Information section

provides an opportunity for students to explain any special circumstances or qualifications not reflected elsewhere in the application.

- **Why:** It can be used to elaborate on an activity or family situation that is not self-explanatory or is not explained elsewhere in the application. For example, clarify academic issues such as a drop in grades or a scheduling conflict that required a student to choose between physics and calculus.
- **How:**
 - Use Additional Information if you wish to explain an important activity you didn't address in the essay or college specific supplement or an activity, family situation, or work obligation that is not self-explanatory. Don't write an additional essay or repeat information that is already covered in the application or supplement.
 - If you answered "Yes" to any Disciplinary question, you must include further information. The explanation should show that you understand what happened, take responsibility for it, regret the lapse in judgment or behavior, and have clearly moved forward.

The My Colleges Tab

- **What:**
 - All colleges that accept the Common Application require a supplement unique to their school. College-specific supplements are found under the My Colleges tab once you select a school

through the College Search function. The landing page for each college details application fees, decision plans, and recommender requirements. Under Questions, each college may feature a wide-ranging set of questions covering academic and career interests, including whether you will apply for financial aid or merit scholarships, as well as whether or not you will enroll under any early admission plan. The questions asked in this section are unique to each college.

- Schools may also require—or include as optional—a Writing Supplement of additional short answers or essays. For example, this is where students are often asked to write the “Why us?” essay (see Chapter 13). This is also where colleges may request additional materials such as resumés, research papers or graded assignments if they are required in the school's admission process.
- In this section on the Common Application, you will also find a tab for assigning recommenders through which you will also access the teacher evaluations and school report forms.
- **Why:** Colleges want to get a sense of your interests, goals, and intentions in order to build a picture of who you are at this moment in time. Again, in most cases, your answers do not commit you to anything—if you write down American Studies as an academic interest, you are not committing to that course of study. Nevertheless, some of your answers here help colleges in

their planning process—for example, your intent to live in campus housing. For some students, the information provided here may also play a larger role in the college’s decision. For example, if a student’s interest is in an area such as engineering or science, the admission office may want to confirm an ability to perform math and science at a certain level. Your answers here will also trigger later responses in the Common Application. For example, if you are applying under an Early Decision program, once you select the Early Decision term option for one school, the ED Agreement will be available in the Supplements section of your Common App account.

- **How:**
 - Give the Questions and Writing Supplements the same time and attention you gave the essay and information gathering called for in the regular application form, whether you are asked to write full essays or short answers, and whether they are required or optional. This information and these essays can be among the most important to an admission staff. Trust us when we say that most admission officers are not begging for more reading material. If it’s here, it’s here for a reason. Take it seriously. Pay attention to the word count in the directions on the supplementary essays since each school may have different requirements and word counts for their questions.
 - Be honest about your need for financial

aid. There are very few students who can afford to pay full college tuition, so by checking “Yes,” you are in the majority. Colleges generally ask this question so they can coordinate communication among the admission office, the financial aid office, and the applicant. Also, the information in this section may or may not be taken into account. Need-blind colleges (see Chapter 16), for example, may deliberately suppress the information in this section for application readers.

- In this section, you may also be asked to indicate whether you will apply for merit aid and you will find information about specific scholarship opportunities. Pay attention here. Merit scholarships are often awarded out of the admission office, so your response acts as a trigger to let them know you are interested.
- If you don’t see the academic area you are interested in pursuing in the menu, select “Undecided. ” And welcome to the club! The most popular intended major at many colleges is “Undecided.” Does this give you an advantage? Not at all. But it is not a disadvantage, either. It’s most important to be honest.
- Read the instructions carefully for execution and submission of the ED agreement. You must inform your school counselor who will also read and sign an ED agreement and a parent/legal guardian must also read and sign the agreement.

Submission

The Common Application, College-Specific Questions and application fees are submitted together. The college-specific writing supplements are submitted after the application. If a school accepts or requires an arts supplement, it may be a separate form available directly from the school or be integrated through the Common Application with SlideRoom.com. The deadline for an arts supplement can often come sooner than the application deadline. Check the information on the college-specific landing page for each school to which you are applying for information about deadlines or go to each college's website. If it's not clear when the application and supplements are due, call the admission office.

Submission of the Common Application, College-Specific Questions and application fees occurs in three steps.

1. Final PDF Review.

- **What:** This is your last chance to make any changes or edits and check for errors. When all required questions have been answered and you're ready to begin the submission process, a preview PDF is generated automatically once you click on the 'Start Submission' button. This is your only opportunity to print out the Common Application. While colleges rarely lose things, they might. So we strongly advise you print out a copy here for recordkeeping.

2. Application Fee Payment.

- **What:** Payment is submitted at the same

time that you submit the Common Application and College-Specific Questions. (College-specific writing supplements can be submitted separately.) Students must

Fee Waivers

While the Common Application is free, colleges may require submission of an application fee. Colleges realize application fees may present a financial hardship for some families, and fee waivers are available to students meeting eligibility requirements. Eligibility guidelines are listed on the Common Application in the Profile section under “Common App Fee Waiver” and can be viewed on the websites of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) at nacacnet.org; ACT, Inc., at act.org; and the College Board at collegeboard.org.

Check the box on the Common Application (in the Profile section) indicating you feel your financial circumstances might qualify you for an application fee waiver. Your school counselor must confirm and verify your eligibility for the fee waiver. Once confirmed, the fee waiver will be applied to all colleges to which you apply and payment will be waived when you submit the Common Application.

Fee waivers may also be available from some state governments and the Expanding College Opportunities program. Non-need-based waivers based on unique criteria specified by individual colleges may also be available from those schools. Check the college websites for this information.

submit an application fee or fee waiver to any college where such payment is required. Application fees can range from no charge to upwards of \$100 per college. Fee information can be found on the college-specific pages for each school to which you are applying or on the websites of the colleges to which you will apply.

- **How:** For the Common Application, payment is made using any major credit card or by providing bank account information that allows for submission of an electronic check. Application fees are nonrefundable. If you have applied for a fee waiver, payment will be waived.

3. Applicant Signature.

- **What:** This section of the application requires you to certify that all information and materials in the application are your own work and that all documents become the property of the college to which they have been submitted; acknowledge that all offers of admission are conditional; and affirm that you will send an enrollment deposit to only one institution.
- **Why:**
 - This section covers a lot of territory. Primarily, it is here to remind students of and reinforce the requirement that the application needs to be a student’s own work. It is also here to enable the college to enforce these provisions. For example, a college may rescind an offer of admission if a student is found to have sent an enrollment deposit to more than one college that accepted him. Admission may also be rescinded

The Meaning of Your Signature— Even When It’s Electronic

Your signature says that you pledge to have upheld the highest standards of honesty, character, and moral and ethical principles. By signing, you are saying that you have told the full truth. You will be held to that standard.

if a student is found to have misrepresented any facts or work in the application. Misrepresenting yourself is so serious that whenever it comes to light, your admission can be rescinded—whether that’s three years later or thirty.

- Think of these certifications in this way: in signing these statements, you are saying, “This is who I am and what I stand for, and I stand by it.” That’s something to be taken very seriously as a matter of personal honor. Colleges require it, and rightly expect it.
- **How:**
 - Read **every word** and understand exactly what you are signing.
 - Be scrupulously honest. If your personal honor isn’t enough, then know that presenting someone else’s work as your own or failing to provide any information honestly is likely to be discovered. More and more schools are conducting audits of applications, including University of California, Harvard, and Stanford.
 - Note the instructional statement requiring applicants to inform the

colleges to which they are applying of any changes in the information in the application, including disciplinary history. Failure to do so can have serious consequences.

ADDITIONAL FORMS

- **Early Decision Agreement.** If you are applying under an Early Decision program, you must complete an ED Agreement. It is discussed further in Chapter 15. In the Common Application, once you select the Early Decision term option for one school,

When Does the Clock Strike Midnight?

If you insist on taking it down to the wire, be aware that on the Common Application, all time stamps are in the United States Eastern Time zone, which is where Common Application offices are located. Also, all deadlines are automatically set as 11:59 p.m. This means that if you are filing from Seattle on January 1, with a January 1 deadline, you will need to submit your application no later than 8:59 p.m. Pacific Time. Colleges do have the latitude to extend their deadlines to their own local time, and many do. And the Common Application is currently reviewing their policy and it may change in the future. If you are using another form or electronic provider, check to see how they time-stamp their applications.

Our advice? Your safest bet is to use U.S. Eastern Time as your standard.

© Best advice

Submit each of your applications well before the clock strikes midnight on the due date.

Deadlines: When Should You Submit the Application?

College deadlines generally cluster around the same time, depending on the type of school and the decision plan a student has selected. You will need to check the website of every college to which you are applying, since deadlines can vary from school to school and may be confusing. And if you receive emails or letters urging you to send in the application earlier than the stated official deadline, don't worry. Take your time and do a good job. However, be aware that many colleges shut down completely between Christmas and New Year's. If you run into problems, the admission office will not necessarily be open to advise you. Plan accordingly.

© Best Advice

Don't wait until the last day to file your application. But there is no need to be the first to submit. It's better to dedicate adequate time to the application. Submit early enough so that if anything goes wrong, you will have time to remedy it.

Also be alert for special circumstances that may affect when you submit your application. For example, you may want to file earlier if receipt of your application determines where you fall in the queue for an alumni interview. And at some large public universities, submitting earlier may give you greater access to housing or scholarships.

Deadline information can be found on the individual landing pages of the schools under the My Colleges tab or on the websites of the colleges to which you are applying. We suggest you develop a method for keeping track of deadlines that works for you—whether that's a piece of paper on your bulletin board or an Excel spreadsheet. Find sample worksheets in Appendix III or on our website at CollegeAdmissionBook.com.

the ED Agreement will be available in the Supplements section of your Common App account.

- **Non-Academic Evaluations.** For colleges that accept or require them, non-academic evaluations can now be submitted by peers, coaches, clergy, instructors, or other individuals as part of the Common Application. These will be found in the Recommenders section. A number of

colleges permit or specifically ask for character references and peer recommendations. The colleges will indicate whether or not they wish to receive these supplemental evaluations. This is not—NOT!—an invitation or expectation to send more recommendations. Always check with a college before sending anything not specifically required.

- **The Teacher Evaluation and the School Report (SR).** These forms have been addressed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 12. On the Common Application, these forms are found on the college-specific pages under Assign Recommenders in My Colleges and can be submitted online or printed out and

Keep track of deadlines with the Application Deadline Organizer available in Appendix III, which you can download as an Excel and Word document at our website at CollegeAdmissionBook.com.

Supplementary Materials

Some colleges encourage any student who wishes to submit supplementary materials. Such materials may include a website URL that documents a special project, an academic paper, a short story, or a YouTube video.

Don't submit supplementary materials unless the school indicates on the application or their website that they welcome or require their submission. If the school's website isn't clear, call or send an email to the admission office and ask if they will entertain additional material.

Filling out an application is in part an exercise in following directions. For example, if a college invites students to submit a one-minute video, that's an opportunity for you to showcase your originality if you choose to do so. But that doesn't mean your video can be two minutes, and it doesn't mean you can send that video to other colleges—unless those colleges have specifically invited you to do so.

Neither should you spend any time devising some flamboyant way to get recognized by the admission office. The application process is not about who yells the loudest, dreams up the most creative contraption, or can pull off the wildest stunt. Let your individuality show, but follow the rules set by the colleges.

mailed by your teachers and counselor.

- **The Midyear Report.** This is a midyear status report covering a student's grades, courses, activities, and disciplinary and criminal history that must be completed by the high school college counselor or guidance counselor. Students should request it be sent to all colleges to which they are applying, either at the end of the first semester or when they submit their official transcript requests. Check the websites of the colleges to which you are

applying for the deadline for submission of this report. This form may also be submitted online through the Common Application.

- **The Final Report.** This is a status report like the Midyear Report, but will verify end-of-year grades and graduation date. It is sent only to the college to which the student has made a commitment to enroll. Colleges usually want this information by no later than early July after high school graduation, so students should check in with their high school counselor before graduation. It is the student's responsibility to make sure the colleges receive both the Final Report and an official final transcript.

Parents, the application form is hands-off, eyes-only. It's fine to proofread the form—but that's it. You're not an administrative assistant (or a ghostwriter!). What's more, admission officers have multiple means of detecting inappropriate involvement. At the end of the application, your student will be signing his name attesting to the fact that the application is his own work. Make it so.

FAST APPS

“Fast apps”—also known as “snap apps” or “express apps”—are fast-track applications that, depending on the college, waive application fees as well as requirements such as

the essay or letters of recommendation—and promise quick decisions.

Selected students may receive an email or letter bearing headings like “Advantage Application,” “Preferred Applicant,” or “Distinctive Candidate Application.” You may be flattered to think you’ve been preapproved for admission when you receive such a letter. But that’s not the case. Fast apps are, in fact, more like Chase or American Express notifying you about a promotional offer you can apply for but might not get.

Arts Students

Students with interest and talent in the arts should check to see if the colleges to which they are applying require an arts supplement. This supplement may be a separate form available from the school or be integrated through the Common Application with Slideroom.com on the landing page of the individual schools in the My Colleges section.

Fast apps are controversial because skeptics believe they are first and foremost marketing tools—colleges employ them to boost the number of applications they can report receiving, which allows them to reject more applicants, which heightens the appearance of selectivity, which in turn boosts status in rankings such as *U.S. News and World Report’s* “Best Colleges” list.

Because they waive fees and make the application process easier, responding to a fast app may be a good idea for some students. But remember that the application process is about finding the right match between student and college. Don’t compromise that goal just because it’s easier to apply with a fast app.

Our best advice: send the fast app only to colleges you are actually interested in attending anyway. And if you choose to use a fast app, make sure you inform your high school college or guidance counselor, who must submit transcripts and other materials. Please note that colleges cannot access school forms for the applicant unless he or she submits a Common Application (not a fast app) to that college. Remember, these offer no guarantee of admission—and you still have to provide all the information necessary for the school to make a decision.

RESUMÉS

Resumés are for adults applying for jobs, not teenagers applying to colleges. In principle, the application form provides students all the space needed for whatever information colleges seek.

So should you attach a resumé to an application? Only if the college specifically requests it.

Jeannine Lalonde, senior assistant dean of admission at University of Virginia and author of the well-known blog *Notes from Peabody*, has this advice:

➔ Students overthink the Activities section of the application. I fear that people are spending way too much time crafting an elaborate answer to a really simple question. What are you involved in? What do you like to do?

Unfortunately, students sometimes go over the top. Instead of just listing their activities, they write four-page resumés. This should be the no-brainer, the easy part to fill out.

To-do List

There are a lot of moving parts to consider in completing your applications. Here's a checklist of tasks and advice to help you do the best job, again using the Common Application as a template:

- Follow directions.
- Keep track of deadlines.
- Be sure to use the most up-to-date version of the applications you are filing. The Common Application changes from year to year and the colleges' unique applications may change as well.
- Add the email addresses for the Common Application and all colleges to which you are applying to your email address book and safe senders list, so important messages aren't treated as spam.
- Sign the FERPA Waiver, waiving your access to the recommendations. On the Common App, you will find this under the "Assign Recommenders" tab. See more about the FERPA waiver in Chapter 12.
- Make sure you complete the college-specific supplements for all the colleges to which you are applying.
- Use the same name on all materials you submit.
- Proofread the application before submitting. Errors of omission, sloppiness, and spelling mistakes can make it difficult for admission officers to do their job.
- Use spell-check, but then check the spell-check because it's not always right. "Coarse" doesn't mean the same thing as "course." As high school counselor Ralph Figueroa says, "Spell Czech is knot yore friend and it will betray ewe. "
- Double-check everything. Make sure that you have completed each section. Small errors in your name, date of birth, or email address can cause big problems.
- Have someone else proofread the application before you submit it. (Notice a pattern here?)
- Request official test scores to be sent by testing agencies such as ACT and the College Board.
- Follow up with your teachers and high school college and guidance counselors to make sure recommendation letters and reports have been submitted. (If your school submits through the Common Application, you can view this on the Dashboard.)
- Request that official transcripts and the midyear report be sent to all colleges to which you are applying. Official transcripts must be submitted from all schools where you have taken classes, such as local colleges, summer schools, or a previous high school.
- Read the signature affidavits carefully and think them through before you hit submit.
- Pay the application fee or request a fee waiver.
- Print a hard copy of all documents and forms before you hit submit.
- Send your applications in on time. Don't wait until the due date—websites can get overloaded and run out of processing capacity. So hit submit before the final hour.

To-do List (continued)

Congratulations! You're almost done. There are just a few more things you will need to do.

- Complete your alumni or admission office interviews at the schools offering them.
- Follow up to make sure all forms and documents have been received at every college to which you are applying. Use the Common App dashboard or check the status pages available online for many colleges. If you can't check online, send an email or place a phone call to the admission office several weeks after submitting your application. Respect that the admission office is busy at this time; don't call every day. In most cases, the school will inform you if your file is incomplete.

Fill in the chart. And in the text box you can expand on something that's really important to you. You don't need to explain what Girls State is. We know what it is. If you've got a leadership position, we know what that means. It's fairly standardized.

It's an energy drain when students really should, at this point, be spending more time crafting the essays.

Colleges ask for information about a student's activities in a specific format because it works for their database. For schools that are "paperless," properly formatted data are essential to an efficient admission process. Remember, at some schools they are reading as many as thirty thousand applications. They don't have time to figure out each student's methodology for listing activities.

Make every effort to use the format provided through the Common Application or, if using another electronic provider or a college-specific application, their format. The Common Application will not allow students to upload a resumé if the college has not specifically requested it. If a school specifically requests or allows it, students will upload the resumé as part of the college-specific writing supplement.

If you feel you have a distinctive or unusual activity to portray and there is not space on the application, check with the admission office about how to include additional information or use the Additional Information section in the application.

Questions You May Have

Can I submit a paper version of the Common Application?

No. The Common Application is online only. Other schools may have their own unique application forms or use another electronic provider. Check the websites of the colleges to which you are applying to see which forms they prefer and/or accept.

Can I print out my Common Application?

The Common Application is now completely paperless. This means that there is no printable version that you will be able to download. A "print preview" copy of your application will only become available to you right before submission since it is intended for record-keeping purposes only.

The supplement for one of the colleges to which I'm applying asks for the names of all

other schools where I am applying. Do I need to provide these?

You do not. Go ahead and list some of the schools you're applying to if you like, or leave it blank if that's what makes you most comfortable. The college is not going to deny you admission just because you do or do not tell them where else you are applying—they may be curious for any number of reasons, but it's not going to affect their decision.

My parents are divorced and I spend equal time at both my mom's and dad's homes. Should I include both addresses on my application?

Many college admission offices are set up to mail to only one snail-mail address at a time. For this reason, you need to pick one home as your primary address, just for the application process. Enter the other address in the Family section.

Why does the application form ask for an "alternate address" when they already have my permanent home address?

The colleges want to be confident they can communicate with you in a timely fashion. Your alternate mailing address may be different if your family uses a post office box, for example, instead of receiving mail at home. Other circumstances may include a student using a temporary residence or spending a semester overseas.

What if my legal name is the same as someone else's who is applying?

Don't worry. That's why the application form asks for other information, such as your birth date. In addition, once you have begun the

application process, the Common Application will assign an identifier number; other schools may assign an institutional bar code. Whatever the school uses, make sure it is on every document you submit.

If a college gives me the option of using their own application or the Common Application, is there an advantage to filling out one over the other?

There is no advantage to filling out one over the other. Colleges that use both have all their admission officers sign a statement saying that the applications will be treated the same.

One of the colleges to which I am applying accepts the Universal College Application. What is this?

The Universal College Application (UCA) is an online application similar to the Common Application. You may also see the Common Black College Application, XAP, or forms from other electronic providers. If a college offers the UCA, Common Application, their own unique application, or another form, use whichever is easiest for you. If the cost of applying is a consideration, you may want to compare the application fees as well.

I have heard there are quotas at some schools. Should I leave the section that asks about race blank?

No school has quotas. It's against the law. We advise you to answer the questions about your ethnicity. It provides additional context for the admission officer when evaluating your application.

There isn't room to list all my AP, IB or SAT Subject Test scores. What do I do?

The Common Application allows you to list up to ten tests. If you have more than ten, give priority to the scores you have already earned, followed by SAT Subject Tests you intend to take. Colleges can use your transcript to discern which AP and IB tests you will take later this year. If you still need more space, you may report the remaining scores for any tests in the Additional Information section.

I am going to be taking the SAT again in the future. How do I let the colleges know this?

In the TESTING section of the Common App you will find the following prompts:

- Do you wish to self-report Standardized Test Scores? Answer YES to this question
- Indicate all tests you have taken or expect to take. A drop down will offer the SAT as an option
- Number of times you have taken the ACT – Answer appropriately
- Number of future sittings you expect – Answer appropriately
- Date – Indicate the month and the year 2013

I don't have a lot of academic honors to report. Will that hurt my chances for admission?

Not every student has received academic honors, and colleges know that. Remember colleges are not just seeking students with academic distinctions. They are building communities—seeking tuba players and point guards and writers.

Does answering the question about my academic interests tie me to a specific major?

In most cases, the answer is no. However if you are applying to a particular school within a university—for example, a college of education, architecture or business—you should check the website to see if students are admitted to a specific college and that college only, or whether their admission is good across that university.

I want to drop a class that I entered on my application as a current course. What should I do?

If you have not yet received your admission decisions, you may drop a class so long as you send each college a note or email saying you have done so, and explaining why. If you have already been admitted, we advise you to call the college and discuss this with them before deciding to drop the class or not. You may find they are not willing to honor your offer of admission if you do not take a specific class they think you will be taking.

Why do all my materials become the college's property?

Many colleges receive too many supplemental materials to return them each to their rightful original owner. It is simply a matter of volume.

Want more?

- Download free copies of this report.
- Learn about our book, ***College Admission, From Application to Acceptance, Step by Step.***
- Read interviews with leading admission deans and college counselors.
- Get the latest admission news and ideas.
- It's all at CollegeAdmissionBook.com.