



TIPS ON FILLING OUT THE COMMON APP:

I've decided to devote this newsletter to how to fill out the Common App. It is both amazing and disappointing that the Common App is complicated enough to warrant more than 20 points of explanation! It got a bit of an overhaul before it reopened in August, but much of the functionality has remained the same.

Reminder to parents: Your children are the ones who should fill out the Common App, and they're the ones who should write the essays. If they have questions about filling out the Common App, please have them refer to this newsletter or this even more extensive [document](#).

Finding your way around the Common App:

You'll see a left sidebar that houses all of the navigation. "My Common Application" is the application that will go to all of your colleges. Use the magnifying glass to search for and load in all of your colleges (if you want to delete any of them, go to "My Colleges" (the graduation cap), click on "Overview" and then delete). You'll be able to access and fill out all of the specific college applications from the "My Colleges" list.

On the "College Search" link (that magnifying glass), you'll find a button at the upper right corner called "Application Requirements." Click on it, and you'll get a handy spreadsheet of application deadlines and requirements for all the colleges you're applying to.

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My Common Application:

- Complete this section first. You'll answer basic questions about you and your parents, and you'll enter information about your high school and your courses.
- You'll note in the **Profile** section which languages you're proficient in. ***They aren't asking about fluency!*** If you're taking Spanish 4 or 5, for example, you are proficient!
- In the **Education** section, you can input your Cumulative GPA **if you want to**. Enter the unweighted or weighted GPA **from your transcript**. If your GPA is confusing (eg, you went to two high schools), you can leave this field blank. If you've changed high schools, you will have to write a short explanation of why you switched.
- When they ask if you've taken coursework at a college, enter any dual enrollment you've taken with your high school. SUPA counts as dual enrollment.
- Under the Future Plans heading of the **Education** section, make sure that your "Highest Degree" and "Career Interest" are in line with the majors that you choose in the Academic section for each college AND with the majors that you talk about in any supplements. And, yes, you can put "Undecided" or "Undeclared"!
- In the **Testing** section, you can choose which test scores you want to report (you do not have to report all of the tests you have taken (except for Georgetown and MIT)). You will input your highest test score from each section, and you'll add the date when you got that score. Most colleges will take those highest scores and then superscore.
- You also get to decide college by college whether you will submit test scores.
- Self-reporting test scores through the Common App is often enough. Most colleges will ask you to send official test scores once you're accepted.
- Report AP scores. Definitely report 4s and above. Consider submitting 3s.
- For the **Activities** section, indicate the grade level that you are going into for any summer activities. For example, if you have a job during the summer between sophomore and junior years, you would select "11." Make sure that you put your activities in the order of most important to least important. There's no need to submit a resume unless you have more activities/jobs than you can fit in the activities section. When you indicate the number of weeks you've done each activity, you should share "how much time you typically spend during the busiest parts of the year."
- Upload your personal statement in the **Writing** section. Remove any weird spacing.
- You'll find the **Additional Information** area within the **Writing** section. Use this wisely. There is now a section for explaining "challenges or other circumstances that you've experienced." You can also share additional details not reflected in the application. Do you need to explain something about your high school? Do you need to explain something about your academic history? Did you have any scheduling conflicts? Be honest, direct, and concise. Feel free to use bullets so that admissions officers can scan this section quickly. They do not want to read an extra essay!

TIPS ON FILLING OUT THE COMMON APP, CONT:

My Colleges:

- Be sure to select the correct button to waive your FERPA rights for letters of recommendation. You only have to do this once, and then it will apply to all of your colleges. If you click the wrong box and don't waive your rights, you can't change it later. Not waiving your right to see your letters of rec can negatively impact admissions decisions.
- Start by completing ALL of the questions under each college. ***Additional supplemental essays may pop up as you complete them***, especially once you've specified your major or academic interest.
- Think carefully and strategically about the **major/s** that you choose. If you're applying to liberal arts colleges where you can explore different majors, it may not make sense to apply to the most competitive major out there. Applying "undecided" is perfectly fine. If you have a "Why Major" supplemental essay to write, make sure that the major you write about is the one that you specify on the application.
- **Optional essays** really aren't optional! Take the opportunity to tell these colleges something more about yourself! Beware of ChatGPT and other AI programs. Colleges want to know WHO YOU ARE, so be specific and personal!
- You get to specify the teacher/s who are writing **Letters of Recommendation** for you for each college you're applying to (in other words, you can vary the teachers according to the college). You can also invite other recommenders on the "Recommenders and FERPA" page. Your colleges will indicate how many of these recommendations they will accept. Please do not overload colleges with extraneous recommendations. Your recommenders will receive an email with instructions on how to submit these letters.
- You will submit each college application separately. When you click on Review and Submit, you can save your application as a pdf, and then you can print it out (if you so desire) and proof it. Do not bypass this step!
- The Common App gets inundated around big deadlines and sometimes does crash. Nothing is worse than clicking "submit" and then watching that little disc spin and spin and spin. Do yourself the favor of submitting a few days (or even a few weeks!) before the deadline.
- If you have submitted any applications before September 1st, make sure you check the prospective student portal for any updates. Colleges have until September 1st to finalize their applications. In the past, colleges have allowed students to write and submit any new essays through that portal.

PHEW! That was a lot. GOOD LUCK! And please feel free to reach out with questions

REVIEWING YOUR STUDENTS' ESSAYS:

I like to remind parents how important it is for kids to feel proud of the essays they've written for college. Writing solid essays can be very affirming to students who are in the midst of a process that can feel very random and even cruel. Moreover, feeling good about their personal essay (the main one that goes to all of their colleges) is critical as they move on to their supplemental essays.

I encourage you to read your child's essays alone (not in a room with your child) and to make sure you have the prompt with you when you are reading. The main personal essay is all about reflection. It provides students an opportunity to show who they are as people and as future college students. The most effective essays – the ones that stand out – share a few common features. Regardless of the prompt, an effective personal essay:

- Answers the prompt
- Showcases a positive trait or characteristic
- Sounds like the high school student who wrote it
- Illustrates something meaningful about the student
- Demonstrates reflection.*

Likewise, supplemental essays must answer the prompts. Sometimes there are several questions within each prompt; students must answer all of them! These essays should be very specific and very personal, so that it is abundantly clear that students did not use AI. If students are asked to explain why they want to attend a particular college or why they want to study a particular discipline, they should link specific interests and experience in order to explain why they are an excellent fit.

Please restrain yourself from editing your child's essays. Their essays may not be exactly what you would write or what you think they should write, but it is absolutely critical that they are authentically theirs. Trust me: admissions officers can smell the writing of a 50-something mom or dad from a mile away. You may think that you are helping their case, but it is very possible that you will end up hurting them. It is also critical that kids do their own best work; we want to make sure that the college that they end up at is the right one for them academically.

Negative feedback from parents can be incredibly demoralizing to a student who has worked so hard on an essay they are proud of. Take this advice from Alison Slater Tate, a college admissions counselor who writes for the Washington Post: "If your child asks you to read their essay, ...treat that essay like the picture they drew for you when they were 4 years old. ...Let other people give constructive criticism. Save the red ink and just tell your kid that you're proud of them."

*Thank you to the WOW Essay Community.

**PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO OTHER FAMILIES WHO WOULD
BENEFIT FROM MY APPROACH AND PERSPECTIVE!
(They can subscribe on my website)**

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I help students and their families navigate the college admissions process while decreasing confusion and stress. I empower students to figure out who they are and where they belong, and I provide structure, insight, and enthusiasm as they apply to colleges that are the best fit academically, socially, and financially. Contact me for a 30 minute complimentary session to learn more!



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