



College Aid Pro™

# OUR MISSION

TO END THE STUDENT LOAN CRISIS BY  
EMPOWERING FAMILIES TO SHOP SMARTER FOR COLLEGE



# College Aid Pro™

The Common Application &  
The College Essay:  
Foundations & Strategies

*Get Ready!*



## Your Presenters

Brian Ford

CAP Admissions Specialist

Dan Bisg

CAP Admissions Specialist



# Overview of the Common Application

- Centralized online portal through which colleges in the United States, Canada, and the world allow students to apply to multiple schools using one application
- Currently over 1,300 schools are participating members
- Can be used in place of a college's own institutional application



# Recent Common Application Notes

- Total application volume through March 1 rose 30% from 2019–20 (5,434,484) to 2022–23 (7,057,980).
- Applicants were also applying to more Common App schools in 2022–23 than in 2019–20 (+8% from 5.3 to 5.7 applications per applicant).
- After a steep decline in standardized test score reporting rates from 2019–20 (74%) to 2020–21 (40%) and a slight rebound in 2021–22 (44%), trends through March 1 suggest a leveling-off of reporting in 2022–23 (43% of applicants have reported a score in an application this season).
- The amount of Common App members requiring standardized test scores since 2019–20 has changed dramatically — from about 55% to just 5% in 2021–22. This season, just 4% of members require a test score in order to apply.



# Creating an Account with the Common Application

A screenshot of the Common App website homepage. The background is a close-up photo of a young woman with curly hair, smiling and looking down. The website header includes the 'common app' logo, navigation links for 'FIND A COLLEGE', 'Plan for college', 'Apply to college', and 'Support your students', a search icon, and buttons for 'Sign in' and 'Create an account'. The main content area features the headline 'Your future starts here' and a sub-headline 'Apply to college for the first time or transfer to complete your degree. Navigate your entire college application journey with Common App.' A prominent button labeled 'Start your application' is positioned below the text.

common app

FIND A COLLEGE Plan for college ▾ Apply to college ▾ Support your students ▾

Sign in Create an account

## Your future starts here

Apply to college for the first time or transfer to complete your degree. Navigate your entire college application journey with Common App.

Start your application





# Common Application Registration

1. Go to [apply.commonapp.org/createaccount](https://apply.commonapp.org/createaccount) and Click - **Create Account**
2. Start Searching/Adding Schools to view more about their specific requirements
3. When Filling Out Information:
  - a. Use a pre-determined email address
    - This is the email colleges will use to contact you about your application status
  - b. Use a password you feel confident you can remember
  - c. Make sure to use your full legal name
  - d. Select “Planning to Start College in 2024”



# Home Page



Welcome, Alex!  
[Practice Applicant](#) [Practice account FAQs](#)  [Sign Out](#)

CAID 28458471  
alex@mcneiladmissions.com

[Dashboard](#) [My Colleges](#) [Common App](#) [College Search](#) [Financial Aid Resources](#)

## Welcome, Alex!


Congratulations on taking this first step in the college application process!

Here are some tips to get you started:

- This tab is your Dashboard. After you add a college to your list, you will see your application progress here.
- All colleges will need you to answer the common questions under your [Common App](#) tab.
- To apply to a college, head over to the [College Search](#) tab.
- Once you have added a college, you can complete and submit your application in the [My Colleges](#) tab.

We are here to help you every step of the way! If you run into any questions or you need some help, check out our 24/7 [Applicant Solutions Center](#) or [contact us](#) at any time.

### Need help?



**What are the hours for student chat?**  
You are able to chat with us Monday-Friday, 12pm-8pm Eastern Time\* (excluding holidays) from October - [Read more](#)


**How can I view a college's Writing Supplement, if they have one?**  
There are two ways you can access a college's Writing Supplement.  
[Read more](#)

**How many colleges can I**



# College Search





Welcome, Alex!  
[Practice Applicant](#) [Practice account FAQs](#)  
CAID 28458471  
alex@mcneiladmissions.com

Sign Out

Dashboard My Colleges Common App **College Search** Financial Aid Resources

## College Search

Application Requirements

College or City Name

Separate multiple search terms with a comma, e.g.: Washington, Boston

[More filters](#)

915 results Sort by: College Name

<a href="#">+</a>	<b>Aberystwyth University</b> Aberystwyth, Ceredigion - GBR	<a href="#">⋮</a>
<a href="#">+</a>	<b>Adelphi University</b> Garden City, NY - USA	<a href="#">⋮</a>

## Need help?



### How do I search for a college?

The **College Search** tab allows you to find the Common App member colleges that interest you. [Read more](#)

### How do I find colleges that are a good fit for me?

Planning for college doesn't have to be stressful. There are many free tools that can help you explore majors. [Read more](#)

# Complete your Profile



Navigation tabs: Dashboard | My Colleges | Common App | College Search | Financial Aid Resources

Left sidebar menu:

- Common App
- Profile
- Family
- Education
- Testing
- Activities
- Writing
- Courses & Grades  
0 college(s) require

Profile Page Content:

Preview

Personal Information

Legal first/given name\*

Mindy

Would you like to share a different first name that you go by? [Learn more](#)

Yes

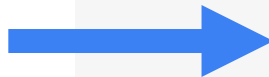
No

Clear answer

# Family Facts



- Dashboard
- My Colleges
- Common App
- College Search
- Financial Aid Resources



- Common App
- Profile
- Family
- Education
- Testing
- Activities
- Writing
- Courses & Grades  
0 college(s) require

## Family

Preview

### Household

Parents' marital status (relative to each other)\*

- Choose an option -

With whom do you make your permanent home?\*

- Choose an option -

Do you have any children?

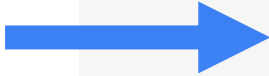
- Yes
- No

Clear answer

# Education Facts



- Dashboard
- My Colleges
- Common App
- College Search
- Financial Aid Resources



- Common App
- Profile
- Family
- Education
- Testing
- Activities
- Writing
- Courses & Grades  
0 college(s) require

## Education

Preview

### Current or Most Recent Secondary/High School

Current or most recent secondary/high school \*

[Find school](#)

Date of entry\*

Date uses "month year" format (e.g. August 2002)

Is this a boarding school?\*

- Yes
- No

[Clear answer](#)

# Testing Facts



Navigation tabs: Dashboard | My Colleges | Common App | College Search | Financial Aid Resources

Left sidebar menu:

- Common App
- Profile
- Family
- Education
- Testing
- Activities
- Writing
- Courses & Grades  
0 college(s) require

Blue arrow points to the Testing menu item.

## Testing

Preview

Tests Taken

In addition to sending official score reports as required by colleges, do you wish to self-report scores or future test dates for any of the following standardized tests: ACT, SAT/SAT Subject, AP, IB, Cambridge, TOEFL, PTE Academic, IELTS, and Duolingo English Test?\*

Yes

No

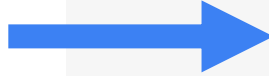
Clear answer

**International applicants:** Is promotion within your educational system based upon standard leaving examinations given at the end of lower and/or senior

# Activities



- Dashboard
- My Colleges
- Common App
- College Search
- Financial Aid Resources



### Common App

- Profile
- Family
- Education
- Testing
- Activities**
- Writing
- Courses & Grades  
0 college(s) require

## Activities

[Preview](#)

**Activities** ▾

Reporting activities can help colleges better understand your life outside of the classroom. Examples of activities might include:

- Arts or music
- Clubs
- Community engagement
- Family responsibilities ([learn more](#))
- Hobbies
- Sports
- Work or volunteering
- Other experiences that have been meaningful to you

Do you have any activities that you wish to report? \*



# Activities

✓ Activity 1

Activity type\*

- Choose an option -

Position/Leadership description

(Max characters: 50)\*

Organization Name

(Max characters: 100)

Please describe this activity, including what you accomplished and any recognition you received, etc.

(Max characters: 150)\*

Participation grade levels\*

- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- Post-graduate

Timing of participation\*

- During school year
- During school break
- All year

Hours spent per week\*

Weeks spent per year\*

I intend to participate in a similar activity in college.\*

- Yes
- No

Clear answer

(9 of 10 available)

Add another activity

Continue



“It’s the one part of the application where they [the student] completely control the voice, and that makes it a really valuable document for us,” said Jeremiah Quinlan, Yale’s former dean of undergraduate admissions. “When you’re applying to an institution with thousands of students who have the same general academic and testing credentials, those things only get you in the door. The rest of the application will separate you out.”



# Does the Essay Really Matter?

## Top Four Reasons Why:

1. It shows your audience your ability to write clearly and use proper grammar
2. It might be the deciding factor if you are on the cusp of getting in - particularly with Test-Optional admissions
3. It provides you the opportunity to showcase a part of your life - an experience, a life lesson, your values, your passion - that is otherwise hidden within your application
4. It gives your application a voice-- a glimmer of your personality!



# Does the Essay Really Matter?

## The Value of the Essay:

- Tells us about your interests and talents in more detail
- Provides context about your background and life experiences
- Offers your voice
- Provides a measure of your writing abilities
- Tells us about what you value as important





# Do's of the College Essay

- Write in your own voice without adopting a phony academic tone. Schools want to hear about the real you, not your image of what a college student should be.
- Define your own life. Tell stories of challenges and change with concrete examples and descriptions. Entice a reader who has thousands of other applications to review.
- Tackle your Covid-19 experience, explaining relevant educational, financial or health issues. Do not allow the pandemic to overwhelm your essay; so many other students have similar tales.
- Show that you researched the college, its programs, and history. Explain why you are a good fit there.
- Put your essays aside for a few days and return for a fresh look. Show them to another critical eye, not necessarily your parents.
- Be sure you answer the question asked or prompt posed. Generalized political statements may not fit the bill.



# Don'ts of the College Essay

- Don't plagiarize. Detection by an automated anti-plagiarism program ensures rejection.
- Don't hype or brag too much. If you write that you had the lead in the school musical, be prepared to tell an interviewer later why the production program lists you in the chorus.
- Don't wait until last minute. Even if you work best under the gun, essays need reflection, revision and time. Admissions websites have crashed when overloaded by deadline submissions.
- Don't repeat yourself. Choose topics to show variety and scope. The point is to reveal the person behind the transcript.
- Proofread and spell check. Nothing turns off a reader more quickly than poor spelling and grammar.



# 2023-2024 Common Application Prompts

# Prompt #1: Tell Us About Your Background

PROMPT #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, please share your story.

- What about my history or background sets me apart from my peers?
- How do I define myself? How do the people who are closest to me define me?
- What have I achieved that has been integral in molding my character and ambitions?
- Does my story have a beginning, middle, and end?

# Prompt #2: The Setback Essay

PROMPT #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?

- What qualifies as a challenge or setback in your life and world?
- Are you the kind of person who can turn every experience, good or bad, into one from which you can learn something? What experiences might illustrate this quality?
- What have been some of the major challenges you've encountered in your life? More importantly, what did you learn from it?

# Prompt #3: The Challenger Essay

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

- When has your opinion been unpopular?
- Why are you the kind of person who is willing to stand up for what you believe in?
- What is important to you on a fundamental level of morals and values?



# Prompt #4: The “Giving Thanks” Essay

PROMPT #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?

- Who do you consider to be positive influences in your life at the moment?
- Is there a time when you benefited from someone else's actions without realizing it in the moment?
- Can you think of a scenario where you were inspired to pay it forward?
- What are ways other people help you that may be small in nature but ultimately help you a great deal?

# Prompt #5: The Accomplishment Essay

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

- How do you react to periods of transition? What inspires a change in your perspective?
- When have you had a “eureka” moment, and how has it impacted the way you lived your life thereafter?
- What were the moments in life that fundamentally changed you as a person?
- When did you learn something that made you feel more adult, more capable, more grown up?

# Prompt #6: Show Your Passion and Pride

PROMPT #6: Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

- What floats your boat? Do you have an appetite for knowledge about something specific? Or, as we asked in the breakdown for Prompt #1: what do you love, and why do you love it?
- What lengths have you gone to in order to acquire new information about or experiences related to a topic of interest?
- How do you typically seek to enrich your knowledge when something appeals to you? Do you have a favorite corner of the library (or internet)? A mentor who is open to answering your burning questions?
- What about the process of learning, especially about subjects that call out to you, is satisfying?

# Prompt #7: Additional Topic of Your Choice

PROMPT #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.

- What do you want admissions to know about you that they wouldn't be able to glean from your transcript, test scores, or teacher recommendations?
- What are the stories that come up over and over again, at the dinner table or in the cafeteria with your friends, that might give admissions some insight into who you are and what is important to you?
- If you had ten minutes alone in a room with an admissions officer, what would you want to talk about or tell him or her about yourself?
- What would you bring to a college campus that no one else would or could?



# Personal Essays VS. Supplemental Essays

## Personal Essays

The primary essay (or essays) required by the college. They are usually focused on the personal side of the student and are open ended in what can be written about.

## Supplemental Essays

Additional essays that may or may not be required by individual colleges. These can vary in length and what they ask (academic, social, local/world issues, etc.), but still provide key insight into the applicant.



# Notable Schools With their Own Essays/ Do not Use the Common App

- Berea College
- Brigham Young University—Provo
- Colorado School of Mines
- Georgetown University
- James Madison University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
- Rutgers University
- Texas A&M University—College Station
- United States Air Force Academy
- United States Military Academy
- United States Naval Academy
- University of California (all 9 campuses)
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- University of New Mexico
- University of Texas—Austin
- University of Washington
- Virginia Military Institute
- Washington and Jefferson College
- Yeshiva University



A black and white photograph of a graduate in a cap and gown, blowing confetti. The graduate is in the center, looking down at their hands. The background is a blurred outdoor setting, possibly a campus.

# NEXT STEPS

..... ○ .....

Keep the ball rolling!

Talk with CAP about how we can support you.

Click [HERE](#)



# College Aid Pro™

**Check Us Out and Take Advantage of Our Free Resources:**

**Subscribe to our YouTube Channel**

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvi\\_51BRybgjJuFpmutLh3g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvi_51BRybgjJuFpmutLh3g)

**Join Our Facebook Group:**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/collegeaidprospayingforcollegeandscholarships/>

**Join Our Office Hours:**

<https://collegeaidpro.com/officehours/>

[support@collegeaidpro.com](mailto:support@collegeaidpro.com)

<https://collegeaidpro.com>





College Aid Pro™

# OUR MISSION

TO END THE STUDENT LOAN CRISIS BY  
EMPOWERING FAMILIES TO SHOP SMARTER FOR COLLEGE